

THE DOCTOR WHO PROJECT

THE CONSPIRATORS

FLORENCE

TWO SICILIES

ITALY about 1494.
B. Bishopric, D. Duchy,
M. Marquisate, R. Republic.
For sites of the first quarter of the
sixteenth century, see the upper inset.
Scale: 6000000

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It was only natural that the citizens of Florence should turn out en masse to witness the wedding of one of the members of their royal family. Ostensibly, the Florentine city-state was a republic, governed by the Lord Priors, but few Florentines were unaware of who really held the strings of power in this city and his name was Cosimo de Medici.

Cosimo's teenage granddaughter, Bianca, rode on a white charger at the head of the procession, resplendent in a white gown trimmed with gold brocade, a garland of olive leaves atop her head. Behind the bride came her maids of honour and behind them followed the rest of the Medici family, escorting Bianca to the Palazzo Pazzi, the home of her new husband. As the procession proceeded down the Via dei Balestrieri, past the Duomo Santa Maria del Fiore, where the bride and groom had received their blessings from the priest, they rode slowly, partly because of the crush of people pressing in against one another in their eagerness to catch a glimpse of the bride and her family and partly because Cosimo's arthritis prevented him from travelling at any great speed.

Ten year-old Lorenzo, Cosimo's eldest grandson, rode alongside his grandfather. Cosimo had not been the same since the death of his youngest and favourite son, Giovanni, his grief confining him to the Palazzo Medici more than his crippling arthritis and gout ever had. He was carried from room to room by his attendants within a palace that now seemed too big for his shrinking family. However, as the procession continued, Lorenzo fancied that he could see some of that old sparkle in his grandfather's eyes as he gazed upon his beautiful granddaughter.

"This is a very special day, Lorenzo," Cosimo said. "Not just for Bianca, but for our whole family."

Lorenzo knew exactly what he meant. Bianca's husband was Guglielmo de Pazzi and if the Medici were Florence's first family then the Pazzi was their closest rivals. However, here and now, Cosimo hoped to bring that rivalry to an end by uniting these two great families by marriage. He and Jacopo, Guglielmo's uncle, had negotiated long and hard to make this alliance a reality and, while Guglielmo and Bianca had both told the notary that they desired this marriage, Lorenzo knew that they had had very little choice in the matter. Cosimo had willed it and so it had to be.

They were approaching the Palazzo Pazzi, where feasting and celebration awaited them. They had made arrangements to entertain over a hundred guests and, as he scanned the jubilant crowd, Lorenzo wondered how many more uninvited attendees the Pazzi family would have to contend with. As long as they were covering the cost, it mattered little to the Medici.

"Mark this day well, Lorenzo," Cosimo continued. "I'm not long for this world and I fear your father may only be able to run the family for a short time after I am gone."

Lorenzo nodded. His father Piero's infirmities were well known.

"It may only be a matter of a few years before you are called upon to lead our family, young Lorenzo," Cosimo said. "You have a fine head on your shoulders - perhaps there is something of your Uncle Giovanni in you, hm? - and I do not doubt you will do me proud, but mark well the lesson to be learned here. Our family has many enemies. These people, they may cheer us now, but tomorrow there are many among them who will be plotting behind our backs, jealous of our influence. We must value our friends, Lorenzo, and if not friends, then allies. You are too young to remember the trouble my support of the Duke of Milan provoked here, but was I not vindicated? It is our alliances that are our strength, Lorenzo, never forget that."

* * * * *

"They are like leeches, sucking my family dry," Lorenzo remarked, scowling at Jacopo de Pazzi as he left the duomo after Mass. Lorenzo had grown into an ugly young man, with a prominent nose and heavy jaw that jutted out from a sallow, deeply lined face. His dark hair, parted in the middle, was long and lank and his eyebrows thick and irregular. When he spoke, it was in a high-pitched nasal whine. Nevertheless, the patriarch of the Medici family was not unattractive, being virile, animated and witty. Apollonia Capponi, who walked beside him, was unsurprised by the rumours of his string of lovers. Indeed, if she had been but a few years younger herself...

"And who might 'they' be?" she asked.

“That damn Pazzi family, of course.” Lorenzo spat out the words. “Everything they are they owe to us. Their fortune, their standing...we raised them up out of the gutter when they married into my family.”

“Your father thought highly of them,” Apollonia said.

“My father and his father before him,” Lorenzo replied, “but what may have been true then does not hold true now. We made them who they are and how do they repay our trust? They loan that Pope forty thousand ducats against our express instructions, betraying not just my family, but the whole of Florence.”

Realising that his voice was rising as he spoke, Lorenzo paused, taking a moment to calm himself.

“Forgive me,” he said, inclining his head towards his companion. “You have no wish to hear me talk of politics.”

“I am honoured that one as busy as yourself can spare the time to talk to me at all,” Apollonia replied.

Lorenzo laughed. “Be that as it may, I am sure that you would rather hear my opinions on Caterina Villani as a potential bride for your son.”

“You observed her at mass, did you not?” Apollonia asked. “I feel that she has an attractive height and figure and a sweet, if shy, manner that would make for a good wife.”

“All that is true,” Lorenzo agreed, “but have you considered Maria Bardi?”

“Maria Bardi?” Apollonia repeated. “Don't you find that girl to be short and somewhat plain?”

“True, but consider the family. Marrying into the Bardi family would be a significant step up the social ladder for your son and, given Maria's unfortunate figure, I have no doubt that the Bardi would be extremely generous to the family that gave her the opportunity to become a wife. Of course, should you still consider the Villani girl to be a better choice then I will not oppose it, but...”

Apollonia fought to keep her face unreadable. She was not convinced at all of the virtue in marrying her eldest son to Maria Bardi, but she had to weigh that against the undoubted detriment to her family should she arrange a marriage contract without the blessing of the Medici.

“I will take another look at the Bardi girl,” Apollonia said, stalling for time. “Perhaps she has qualities I have overlooked.”

“I am sure that you will see the merit in my advice,” Lorenzo said.

By this time, they had arrived at the gates of the Palazzo Medici and Lorenzo took his leave of Apollonia. His wife, Clarice, was waiting for him inside. She held herself haughtily, but allowed her husband to run a hand through her long red hair and to plant a kiss on her cheek.

“I will join you for dinner shortly, my love,” Lorenzo whispered in her ear, running the back of his hand along her swan-like neck, “but first I have some more business to attend to. You understand?”

“Of course,” Clarice replied. “You cannot neglect your work. I will speak to the cook.”

Clarice stepped imperiously from the room, every inch the daughter of Roman princes, and Lorenzo pitied the cook should his efforts be anything less than perfect. Shaking his head with amusement, he turned his steps towards his study. His secretary, Stefano, appeared at his side.

“There is a Giulio Allori here to see you, sir,” he said. “I believe he wishes to appeal for your aid in gaining political office for his son.”

Lorenzo sat down behind his desk.

“Does the son show promise?”

“Indeed, sir,” Stefano replied. “He has, if I may be so bold, the makings of a sharp political mind.”

“Not necessarily the qualities we would be looking for in one of our ruling elite,” Lorenzo remarked. “Send him in, Stefano, send him in.”

Stefano returned momentarily with Allori. He was a short, balding man, who seemed to believe that expensive clothes could mask a lack of taste. He took one look at Lorenzo and fell to his knees.

“O most magnificent and revered Lorenzo,” he began, hands clasped in front of him as if in prayer, “I am here to humbly beseech you on behalf of my only son.”

“Yes, yes,” Lorenzo said. “I understand that you wish me to arrange for your son to hold office.”

“Yes, your magnificence.” Allori's head was so bowed he was practically kissing the floor.

“I'm afraid I don't see what you expect me to do. I am but a humble banker.”

“With respect, your magnificence, it is well known that the mighty Lorenzo is far more than just a humble banker. Many powerful men look to you for guidance.”

“It puzzles me, Giulio - I may call you Giulio? - it puzzles me that you can claim to think so highly of me and yet show me so little respect.”

“I don't understand?” Allori said.

“I have heard of you, Giulio Allori, and I am aware of the aid that your family provided in the creation of the palazzo of my rivals, the Pazzi.”

“But, your magnificence, is not your own sister married to one of the Pazzi.”

“My grandfather extended the hand of friendship and they bit it off,” Lorenzo snapped. “Your own friendship with them shows to me how little respect you have for my own family. And yet you still feel that you can turn up here, at my home, and ask me for favours?”

“Your magnificence, I meant no disrespect,” Allori insisted. “Please, you must believe me. Tell me what I can do to make it right.”

“All that I desire is your friendship, Giulio,” Lorenzo said, “but how can you be my friend when you still ally yourself with my enemies?”

“I will sever all ties with the despicable household this very day,” Allori said, “as a mark of my loyalty to you and your family.”

Lorenzo stepped out from behind his desk and, lifting Allori to his feet, he put an arm around him like a brother.

“My dear Giulio, you are a true friend. Just leave the matter of your son with me. I can make no promises, but I will do whatever one friend may do for another. Will that be enough for you?”

“Your magnificence is too kind and more than generous,” Giulio bowed. “I am a slave to the magnificent Lorenzo.”

Then, still bowing, he walked backwards out of the room.

“Speak to our contacts on the scrutiny commission,” Lorenzo said to Stefano. “Be sure that Allori's son makes it onto the list of eligible names. From there he can make it to the Lord Priors on his own merit. That shouldn't be a problem for him, assuming the boy's as talented as you seem to think, Stefano.”

The door to the study was thrown open.

“Lorenzo, I thought I'd find you in here.”

Lorenzo fought to hide his displeasure at his younger brother's intrusion.

“Stefano,” he said, “would you mind giving Giuliano and I some privacy?”

Stefano inclined his head and left hurriedly. Lorenzo sat back down.

“Well, brother, what can I do for you today?” he asked.

Giuliano was both younger and more handsome than his brother, but today he looked like a ghost. His skin had a pale, yellowy pallor and there were dark circles around his eyes. He put a hand in front of his mouth as he coughed harshly.

“I want to know what you've been getting up to in here with these secret meetings of yours,” Giuliano said when he had recovered his composure.

“My meetings aren't secret,” Lorenzo replied.

“But you never tell me about them.”

“You wouldn't be interested, Giuliano,” Lorenzo insisted. “I know politics sounds interesting, but it's all boring meetings and paperwork. It's really, truly dull and I wouldn't want to inflict that on you. You have your freedom and your hunting and I would much rather you remained at liberty to enjoy your pleasures.”

“Yes, but...”

“Come now, Giuliano. There's no sense both of us being burdened by the tedious monotony of work. I really do have your best interests at heart, you know.”

“I know, Lorenzo,” Giuliano admitted reluctantly, “but I still wish you would involve me more.”

“And I will. I promise. But as for the present, Clarice is waiting for me. Why don't you join us for dinner? I promise that good food and fine wine is a far more satisfying prospect than indulging in politics. And then you must return to bed. You are ill, Giuliano, and you must remember to look after yourself. We can talk again once you've recovered your strength.”

* * * * *

Francesco de Pazzi looked out at the bustling city of Rome, so different from his native Florence.

“Francesco, will you step away from that window and sit down, please,” his host, Archbishop Salviati, instructed. “We can't afford to be seen together.”

“You worry too much, Salviati,” Francesco said, nonetheless taking both the archbishop's advice and a seat.

“Better to worry too much than too little,” the third person in the room remarked. This was Giovan Battista, Count of Montesecco, a papal soldier who had served as Captain of the Apostolic Palace Guard.

“I am, however, at a loss as to why I am here,” Battista continued.

“All will be revealed shortly,” Salviati replied, “but first I must ask you to take an oath. Do you swear not to reveal to anyone else what is discussed in this room?”

“I swear it,” Battista said, a puzzled frown plastered across his face.

“I have heard that you are a man of honour,” Francesco said, lounging lazily in his seat, “so I will accept your word. As to why we are here, it is for no less a reason than to force a change in the government of Florence. You will, of course, have heard of the stranglehold the Medici have over the city.”

“I have heard,” Battista agreed, “and I would help in whatever way I can, but...”

“But?” Francesco echoed. “What is this hesitation, Count? Don't you see the importance of what we do here.”

“Indeed I do,” Battista replied, “but I am a soldier in the pay of the Pope and his nephew, Count Riario. I could not enter into any plans without their consent.”

“Do you think we have not already considered this?” Salviati asked. “On whose behalf do you think we are acting? Neither the Pope nor the Count has any great love for Lorenzo de Medici. Why, if the Medici had had their way then the Pope would have been denied the loan he needed in order to buy Imola as a gift for his nephew.”

“Furthermore,” Francesco added, “Lorenzo attempted to block the appointment of our friend Salviati here to the archbishopric of Pisa, wanting to appoint his own candidate against the Pope's wishes. Trust us, the Pope would like for nothing more than you to grant us your aid us in this matter.”

“Then you shall have it,” Battista declared, “but how do you plan to achieve your aims?”

“Though it pains me to admit it,” Salviati replied, steepling his fingers, “I fear that the only way is to eliminate both Lorenzo and his brother, Giuliano, and to have soldiers ready to go into Florence to consolidate our position.”

“My lords, please think about what you are saying,” Battista said. “I fear that what you propose may be impossible. As I understand it, Lorenzo is much loved in Florence and can count on a good deal of support from its people. Do they not call him the Magnificent?”

“Giovan Battista, you have never been to Florence,” Francesco de Pazzi patiently explained, “whereas I have lived there all my life. Believe me when I say that, though they fear to speak out publicly, the Florentines hate the Medici and they will thank us when these two brothers are dead.”

“But you are right,” Salviati said. “This matter will be much more likely to succeed with the aid of the people rather than their opposition. To this end, we have attempted to enlist the help of Messer Jacopo de Pazzi.”

“My uncle is much respected by the Florentines,” Francesco said. “He was knighted by the Lord Priors at their behest in recognition of his services to Florence. His name and his dignity will draw the people to our cause like moths about a candle. Unfortunately, my uncle is reluctant to commit himself to our plot. He feels that the enterprise is too risky.”

“This is why we need your help,” Salviati said. “We need you to go to him, as one soldier to another, and use your military expertise to show him that our enterprise can work. Also, go to him in your role as emissary of the Pope. When he hears that our scheme has the blessing of Pope Sixtus himself then there is no doubt that he will change his mind. Will you do this thing for us, Giovan Battista? Or, if not for us, will you do it for your Holy Father?”

* * * * *

Early morning sunlight reflected back off of the surface of the River Arno, casting strange dappled shadows across the side of the three-arched stone bridge known as the Ponte Vecchio. The bridge was inhabited, with shops at either end, and Anna Gaddi was already helping her father open up his baker's stall on the south side of the bridge when she heard a strange trumpeting sound from down below. Checking to make sure that her father was not looking, Anna snuck out of the shop and peered over the edge of the bridge. She gasped at what she saw and instantly clapped her hands over her mouth lest her father hear her.

Down below, in the shadow of one of the supports, a blue box was fading into existence.

When it had fully materialised, the trumpeting stopped and a door opened in one side of the box. A man stepped out, immediately complaining as water lapped over his boots. He adjusted his robe, which was a deep blue trimmed with silver, like someone unaccustomed to wearing such finery, then scampered up the riverbank to the road. He glanced about, as if aware he was being observed, and Anna ducked down behind the side of the bridge where he would not be able to see her. Eventually, satisfied no one was watching him, the man strode up onto the bridge and headed across the river into the centre of Florence.

Anna stuck her head around the door of her father's shop.

“Father,” she called, “you can manage on your own for a while, can't you? I have a few errands to run for mother.”

Before her father had time to reply, Anna darted off, skipping in the stranger's wake.

* * * * *

Dressed in black doublet and hose, Niccolo Machiavelli deliberately scuffed his shoes on the cobblestones because he knew that it would annoy his parents. He was a sullen boy, whose lower lip seemed to be constantly thrust forward, petulantly. Stepping out into the street, he was forced to jump back as a cart rumbled past, its driver yelling at him to pay more attention. Niccolo shrugged off the abuse and returned to his thoughts. He was a thinker, a quiet young man who preferred his own company to that of others. He liked nothing more than to be left alone to turn over problems in his head. Unfortunately, his father had other ideas. He did not think it was healthy for a growing boy to spend so much time shut away in his room and was constantly (or so it seemed) berating Niccolo for not being more like his brother Totto. Tired of this haranguing, Niccolo had snuck out, hoping he could get some peace by wandering the city streets.

His peregrinations had brought him to the old market and a group of street performers were entertaining at the edge of the square. One man scraped a bow up and down his viola, while another pair juggled with a mixture of fruit and wooden balls. The balls had once been painted bright, eye-catching colours, but most of the paint had now peeled off through frequent use. A fourth man was reciting a poem extolling the virtues of the Magnificent Lorenzo, which might have piqued Niccolo's

interest if he had not heard the same sentiments from his father many, many times before. The performers' audience seemed to consist mainly of children Niccolo's age or younger. Niccolo joined the throng, not because he was interested in the performers, he told himself, but because his feet were sore from all this walking.

Niccolo adopted a bored expression as he watched the jugglers throw the instruments of their trade ever higher. Then he noticed movement out of the corner of his eye. A dark haired man in a rich blue robe - far too extravagant for a common street entertainer - had stepped between the jugglers and their audience and had knelt down before the little girls in the front row. He opened his left hand to reveal a palm full of florins. He closed it again, waved his hand in front of the enraptured girls and, when he opened it, the coins were gone. With a grin, the man then proceeded to pluck all five coins from behind the ear of the nearest girl, who giggled and clapped her hands in appreciation. The rest of the audience, even Niccolo, joined suit. He knew that it was not really magic, just sleight of hand, but the performance was novel, at least.

Setting the coins dancing across the back of his right hand, then jumping from one hand to the other, the man beamed at his audience. His gaze fell upon Niccolo and his eyes narrowed. Niccolo shivered despite the spring warmth. Smile fading, the man in blue tossed the coins into the air and then caught them with a flourish.

"You've been a wonderful audience." Rising to his feet, he bowed to them. Then, ignoring the cries of disappointment, he hurried off, leaving Niccolo staring anxiously after him.

* * * * *

Giovan Battista sat alone at a table in a darkened corner of the Inn of the Bell watching his fellow patrons warily. How had he, a hero of the Battle of Molinella, been reduced to this? He was a soldier and it was beneath his dignity to engage in such an underhand conspiracy as this, yet he was a loyal servant of the Pope and if it was the Pope's wish that he act as emissary to Jacopo de Pazzi in this matter than that was what he would do. He could not, however, be ordered to like it.

He was growing impatient. He had arranged to meet the senior Pazzi here over an hour ago, but Jacopo had yet to appear. Battista had chosen not to dine until the knight arrived, but the smell of slow-cooking meat assaulted his nostrils with a thoroughness of attack no Venetian could hope to match and Battista was growing to regret his decision. He was about to wave the innkeeper over and order something after all, when he noticed a man in rich blue and silver robes entering the inn. Battista pursed his lips as he studied the newcomer. He had never met Jacopo de Pazzi before, never even been to Florence before today, and he had only the description supplied by Jacopo's nephew, Francesco, to work from. He had expected Jacopo to be older, but in all other particulars, this individual seemed to match. Perhaps the Pazzis aged well.

He leaned forward, trying to overhear this newcomer's conversation with the innkeeper. Battista could only make out snatches of their dialogue, but the man seemed to be here to meet with someone and was asking the innkeeper for aid. Of course, Jacopo would have no more idea of what Battista looked like than he had of Jacopo. Rising from his table, Battista crossed the inn and slapped a hand down on the man's shoulder.

"Giovan Battista, Count of Montesecco," he introduced himself. "I believe you are here to see me."

"I am?" the man said. Battista smiled. Jacopo would naturally be cautious in his dealings with a conspirator.

"Come, let us talk where we won't be overheard," Battista said, herding the man over to his corner table. "You know why I am here, of course."

"No," the man replied. "To be honest, I haven't the faintest idea."

"Of course, you haven't, of course you haven't," Battista said hurriedly. "It was wrong of me to even suggest that you might have some prior knowledge of...these matters. I shall probe no further, merely outline the matter of which I came here to speak, Messer Jacopo."

The man began to rise. "I really think you have me confused with someone else."

"I'm sorry, I meant no disrespect. We should not use names. That was careless of me."

"That's not what I meant..."

"Please do not leave yet," Battista insisted. "At least give me a chance to say my piece. I have travelled all the way from Rome to speak to you, as one soldier to another, and to convince you that this plan of your nephew can succeed."

"Plan?" The man leaned forward, eyes sparkling with interest. "What plan?"

"Why, to eliminate your rivals."

"My what?" The man began to count off on his fingers. "And you think I'm... Which would mean my rivals would be... Tell me, what year is this?"

"The year? Surely you jest?"

"Just tell me the year."

Battista shrugged. "It is the year of our lord fourteen hundred and seventy eight."

"Fourteen hundred and... Oh no. Of all the... Stupid, stupid, stupid, Doctor."

"Doctor? Are you unwell?"

"If he isn't now then he soon will be." Battista looked up to see another man towering over him. "Giovanni Battista, I presume. I am Jacopo de Pazzi. I believe you were expecting me."

Battista's mouth opened and closed like a fish. Jacopo's hair was shot through with grey and his face was heavily lined, but otherwise the resemblance between the two men was uncanny.

"And who is this individual?" Jacopo asked.

"I thought he was you."

"Did you now? I suppose he does look a bit like a younger me. How much did you tell him?"

Battista recovered quickly.

"Too much," he admitted.

"As I feared." Jacopo turned to the stranger. "So, who are you?"

"I'm usually referred to as the Doctor."

"Doctor is it?" Jacopo laughed. "Well I will refer to you as a spy."

* * * * *

"Bianca, at least think about it," Lorenzo said.

"Think about what?" Bianca snapped. "I am not about to leave my home just on your say so, baby brother."

Bianca was as tall as her brother and shared the darkness of his hair, though hers was smooth and soft, tied in plaits wound round her head. She wore a green dress with a plunging neckline. The hem of the dress, picked out in gold thread, trailed almost to the floor.

Lorenzo bristled. "I am the head of this family and I am..."

"What, Lorenzo?" Bianca paused in her pacing of Lorenzo's study. "I do hope you weren't about to order me."

"Bianca, you are a Medici," Lorenzo said. "You belong here with us."

"I belong with my husband, a Pazzi, or are you too young to remember our grandfather selling me off?"

"I remember," Lorenzo growled.

"Am I to take it that you think the alliance between our two houses was a mistake?"

"Yes, you may take it that way," Lorenzo replied. "The Pazzi are nothing but trouble."

"You're just jealous that they've built up a banking empire to rival yours," Bianca pointed out. "Far be it from the Magnificent Lorenzo to tolerate a rival."

"Why should I?" Lorenzo banged a fist on his desk. "Why should we? We are the Medici. We were born to greatness. What were the Pazzi before we came along? Nothing, Bianca. They were nothing!"

"If that were true, do you really think our grandfather would have bothered with an alliance?"

Lorenzo waved her comment away.

“You sully your reputation and that of the whole Medici family by your association with these peasants. I ask you again to come and live here in the palazzo.”

“Those ‘peasants’ are my family now,” Bianca replied. “And what of my husband, is he invited here too? Of course not. He's just a Pazzi after all.”

“You said yourself that you were forced into this marriage. I would have thought that you would be glad to rid yourself of the dolt.”

Bianca laughed, which only annoyed Lorenzo all the more.

“You really have no idea, do you, little brother,” she mocked. “I had hoped that Clarice might have smoothed out some of your rough edges, but I can see I was mistaken. I bid you good day, Lorenzo. Let us never talk of this matter again.”

She spun on her heel and walked away. A short while later, Clarice knocked on the study door and poked her head inside to find Lorenzo still slumped in his chair, brooding.

“I take it your sister was here,” she said, taking note of his sullen expression.

“Is it that obvious?” Lorenzo sighed.

“She's the only one I know who never fails to beat you in an argument,” Clarice replied.

* * * * *

Guglielmo de Pazzi entered the room without knocking. His brother and uncle were already present, as was a girl who sat on a wooden chair and chewed her thumb nervously. Guglielmo offered her a reassuring smile. Uncle Jacopo, whose face seemed fixed in a permanent scowl, was hardly the most comforting of people.

“You did the right thing by coming to me, Anna,” Jacopo was saying. “I have a long memory and will not forget this kindness.” He produced a small bag, heavy with coins, and placed it in the girl's hands. “I want you to give this to your father,” he continued, “as a reward for raising such an intelligent child.” He ruffled the girl's hair. “Now run along. I am sure he is worried sick about you.”

“Thank you, Messer Jacopo, sir,” Anna replied, squeezing past Guglielmo on her way out of the door.

Jacopo turned to Francesco. “Make the necessary arrangements, then I'd like you to join me when speaking to our guest.”

Jacopo was out of the room almost before his nephew could say, “Of course, Uncle.”

“What was that all about?” Guglielmo asked his elder brother.

“Business,” Francesco replied simply.

“Business? Then don't you think I should be involved?”

“No, I don't.”

“And does this have something to do with your trip to Rome that neither you nor Uncle Jacopo will talk to me about?”

“I was arranging some new loans,” Francesco said. “They were for important clients so Uncle felt that I should oversee them personally.”

“If that were true then there would be something in the ledgers,” Guglielmo pointed out. “I wasn't born yesterday, Francesco. I know when something doesn't smell right.”

“Good for you.” Francesco gathered up his things. “Now, if you'll excuse me, I have more pressing matters to attend to.”

Guglielmo stepped away from the door, but as his brother passed him he asked, “Don't you trust me?”

Francesco paused on the threshold. “No, Guglielmo, I don't.”

“This is about Bianca, isn't it. You've never liked her.”

“She's a Medici. They're not to be trusted.”

“Uncle Jacopo doesn't think so.”

“Oh yes he does,” Francesco insisted. “Just because we allied ourselves with them does not mean that we should ever trust them. They will stab us in the back if we give them the opportunity.”

“So what are we supposed to do?” Guglielmo asked. “Get them before they get us?”

Francesco licked his lips. "You've forgotten your loyalty to your family. If you want to be one of us then you must distance yourself from your Medici in-laws."

"And what about my wife?"

"The ties of blood are stronger. It's about time you remembered that."

* * * * *

The window was not barred, but the presence of Giovan Battista standing sentry-like in the corner of the room prevented the Doctor from considering it a serious possibility for escape. He had been brought straight here from the inn, here being a guest bedroom in the Palazzo Pazzi. Giovan Battista had been left to guard him while Jacopo de Pazzi attended to other business. The Doctor hoped that that other business did not involve making preparations for the discreet disposal of his corpse. He had attempted to engage Battista in conversation, but the Count of Montesecco refused to speak to him, which was a shame because he had been quite chatty back at the inn. Clearly, the mistake he had made with regard to the Doctor's identity had prejudiced him against his prisoner. The Doctor could expect no aid from that quarter. He had tried to catch forty winks, but the bed was hard and the Doctor was too troubled to properly relax. Of all the years he could have arrived in Florence...

So it was that he was standing at the window and looking up at the great floating dome of the duomo when Jacopo returned. He turned slowly.

"Messer Jacopo. I wish I could say it was a pleasure. And you've brought me another visitor. Your son?"

"My nephew, Francesco," Jacopo replied, introducing his companion. "We're here to find out why you were spying on the Count of Montesecco and impersonating me."

"Doesn't this sort of thing normally involve thumbscrews and hot irons?" the Doctor asked genially.

"Only if you refuse to cooperate." Francesco grinned wolfishly.

"Ah, you must be the bloodthirsty member of the family," the Doctor said. "How quaint."

Francesco backhanded the Doctor across the face and he staggered back, putting a hand out to the bed to steady himself.

"Touched a nerve, have I?"

Jacopo folded his arms. "I would rather do this without pain."

"You won't get any argument from me," the Doctor replied, nursing his jaw.

"Who are you?"

"I've told you, I am the Doctor."

Francesco raised his arm to strike again, but Jacopo waved him back.

"Very well, 'Doctor,'" he said, "what are you doing in Florence?"

"I came to visit an old friend."

"Who?"

"Leonardo da Vinci. Perhaps you've heard of him?"

"One of Lorenzo's protégés," Jacopo replied.

"Is he really?" the Doctor said. "I'm afraid I'm a little behind on current affairs."

"And will this Leonardo vouch for you?" Jacopo asked.

"Well, that would really depend on whether or not he's met me yet..." The Doctor scratched his beard thoughtfully.

"He thinks we're fools, Uncle," Francesco spat angrily.

"No, Francesco," Jacopo told his nephew without ever taking his eyes from the Doctor, "he simply realises that we already know the truth so there's no harm in making his cover story as absurd as he likes. That's right, isn't it, 'Doctor'?"

'Very little about this is 'right', Messer Jacopo. I came to Florence for a break. I wanted to spend some time with a friend doing very little of consequence for a change, but instead you seem determined to involve me in your little conspiracy to assassinate the Medici!"

There was a sharp intake of breath from his audience and the Doctor realised that he had gone too far.

“Who said anything about assassinating the Medici?” Jacopo asked quietly.

“The Count must have mentioned it.” The Doctor pointed at Battista.

“No, I did not,” Battista told Jacopo.

“I know,” Jacopo said. “You have been betrayed by your own lips.”

Without another word, Jacopo left the room, his nephew trailing behind. The door slammed shut behind them with an ominous finality.

“Well you were a great help,” the Doctor complained to Battista before lying back down on the bed.

* * * * *

“We should kill him,” Francesco said.

Jacopo shook his head. “There is already too much bloodshed in this enterprise of yours. I won't countenance any more.”

“Does that mean that you agree to help us?” Francesco asked, surprised.

“The Count has convinced me that success is possible and he assures me that we have the Holy Father's blessing. That is true, isn't it?”

“Absolutely, Uncle,” Francesco insisted. “Salviatti spoke to him himself.”

“Hardly the most reliable of sources,” Jacopo remarked, “but your word and that of the Count will suffice. I have no love for Lorenzo de Medici. That boy's lust for power will consume the city if something is not done. He sees himself as another Caesar and won't be satisfied until they crown him prince. It is a shame his brother must die as well, though.”

“If Giuliano lives,” Francesco pointed out, “then the rest of the family will have a figurehead to rally around and we will be no better off than we were before. Worse, because they will be expecting an attack so we will be denied the opportunity to mount one.”

“I know all that,” Jacopo snapped. “I am old, not senile. I'm just saying that it is a shame, that is all.”

“I still say it would be safer to eliminate the spy.”

“And I still say no. Am I the head of this house or not?”

Francesco bowed his head. “I am sorry, Uncle.”

“The spy is only dangerous to us if he is allowed to pass on what he knows before we act. We can keep him here until then. After that, the whole of Florence will know what we have done. Let us pray that they choose to thank us and not condemn us as the murderers we shall be.”

* * * * *

Night had fallen when the Doctor was woken by a knock at the door.

He glanced at Battista.

“Come in!” he yelled.

A slight man with curly red-brown hair entered the room.

“Leave us,” he instructed Battista.

“Messer Jacopo ordered me never to leave the prisoner unguarded.”

“Is Messer Jacopo not my uncle?” the man replied, haughtily. “Leave us.”

Cowed, Battista slunk from the room.

“So you're another one of Jacopo's nephews, are you?” The Doctor sat up on the bed. “But which one, I wonder... No, don't tell me. Guglielmo.”

“You're very well informed,” Guglielmo said.

“History's something of a hobby of mine.”

“History?”

“Well, everything is history from somebody's point of view.”

"You speak like one of the astrologers who ply their trade in the market square." Guglielmo pulled a chair over to the bed and sat down. "Can you read the future in the stars?"

"I've been known to," the Doctor said, "on occasion."

"My uncle thinks that you're a spy."

"Yes, I got that impression. I'm not, though."

"But you do know what he and my brother are planning."

"This is April 1478?"

Guglielmo nodded.

"Then yes, I've a pretty good idea what they are up to."

"Would you tell me?" Guglielmo asked.

"I can't," the Doctor said. "I'm sorry, but I've already interfered too much already."

Guglielmo shook his head slowly. "I don't understand."

"I'm not supposed to be here. Events are supposed to happen a certain way and my being here could change all that. I just wanted some time to rest. I thought that I could visit a friend and leave my troubles behind me for a while."

Guglielmo was sympathetic. "We all want to do that from time to time."

"I even went so far as to find this ridiculous get-up so that I wouldn't attract any undue attention," the Doctor said, tugging at his robe. "Everyone was just supposed to carry on as if I wasn't here. I should have known things were not going to work out when I saw that boy."

"What boy?"

"Doesn't matter. Suffice it to say that he was my first clue as to when I had ended up."

"Don't you mean where?" Guglielmo asked.

"If you like," the Doctor replied absently. "The point is that I probably couldn't have chosen a worse time to visit Florence if I tried."

"You're talking as if whatever is going to happen already has."

"As I said, from a certain point of view, everything is history."

"And you have seen it?"

The Doctor shrugged. "Some of it?"

"Please, you must tell me what my uncle is planning," Guglielmo pleaded. "I think...no, I know that he is acting against the Medici."

The Doctor said nothing.

"Please, my wife is a Medici. Lorenzo and Giuliano are my brothers-in-law. Lorenzo may not be the nicest of people, but I would not want anything to happen to him."

"I'm sorry, Guglielmo," the Doctor said. "I wish I could help you, but if I say anything then I run the risk of changing things. I dare not do it."

Guglielmo hung his head dejectedly.

"I believe you. And, despite what my uncle may think, I know you're not a spy."

"Thank you."

Guglielmo raised his head, his green eyes boring into the Doctor's.

"If you were allowed to leave here, where would you go?"

"Away from Florence," the Doctor replied. "I think I have overstayed my welcome."

"Then I will help you escape. There are ways out of this palace where we will not be observed by my uncle's staff."

"You are a good man, Guglielmo," the Doctor said. "You and your wife can look forward to many more years together. And many more children. You have my word."

* * * * *

The Doctor hunched his shoulders and looked down at the ground as he hurried across the Ponte Vecchio. The bridge was one of his favourites in Italy, perhaps the world, but as he strained his ears for signs of pursuit, he did not have time to appreciate it. He liked Florence, he really did, and it was

a shame that his visit had come to such an abrupt end. Still, once he found the TARDIS, there was nothing to stop him drifting back a few years and having another go, was there?

Buoyed by this thought, he stopped at a baker's on the south end of the bridge and bought himself some sweet pastries for the journey. The girl who served him laughed as he made a show out of sorting the florins from his other assorted coinage from across the galaxy and the Doctor beamed right back at her. Then, purchases tucked securely under one arm, he scrambled down the riverbank to where he had left the TARDIS.

It was not there.

The Doctor wondered for a moment if perhaps he had made a mistake and he had left his ship on the other side of the bridge, but no, there was the square outline of its base in the grey sand. There too were the tracks of a cart which had been driven up to the TARDIS and then, far more heavily laden, been driven back up the bank. Bent almost double, the Doctor began to follow these tracks until his progress was brought to an abrupt halt by the sharp point of a pike that was level with his eyes.

The Doctor drew himself up to his full height. Seeing that he was surrounded by half a dozen armed men, he raised his hands.

"To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"You are under arrest," the man with the pike told him, "by order of the Magnificent Lorenzo."

The Doctor sighed. "Here we go again..."

* * * * *

Jacopo's favourite mare whinnied as he crossed the stables and he paused to pat her reassuringly on her chestnut flank. Satisfied that she was both healthy and calm, he continued across the courtyard to where the blue box had been brought. It did not look like much. If the baker's daughter had not informed him of its connection with the spy then he would not have given it a second thought. The girl had clearly realised this, concocting a fantastical story of how it had appeared by magic, as if Jacopo would give credence to such fancies. It was a cabinet, slightly larger than the height of a man. Small windows were set into the doors, but the glass was opaque, and the writing on the box, while in the Roman alphabet, was a mystery to Jacopo. The doors themselves were locked and no amount of provocation from Jacopo's staff could force them open.

What secrets did the box hold, Jacopo wondered. Perhaps he could force the spy to tell him, though Jacopo disliked the idea. He had already discerned that this Doctor was not going to give up any information voluntarily, which meant that Jacopo would have to resort to torture if he wished to learn anything from him, something he found distasteful.

"Uncle! Uncle, come quickly."

Jacopo glanced over his shoulder to see Francesco barrelling across the courtyard towards him.

"What is it, Francesco?" he asked.

"It's the spy," Francesco replied, breathlessly. "He's escaped."

Jacopo slammed a meaty fist into the side of the spy's box. The wood refused to splinter.

* * * * *

Niccolo's mouth was painfully dry, but he was too much in awe of his host to ask for water. When he had run all the way here from the inn, he had had little idea that he would end up a guest of the Magnificent Lorenzo. He wished that he could be as relaxed as Lorenzo's other 'guest', the conjurer in the blue and silver robes. Ignoring the guards flanking him, he was studying the room, its furnishings and the paintings on the walls as if considering a possible purchase. He grinned at Machiavelli and the fluttering in the boy's stomach evaporated as if by magic.

“Perhaps we could get something to drink,” the conjurer said, turning to his guards for the first time since he had arrived. “I don’t know about you, but I’m parched.”

“Indeed, some refreshments for our guests.” Lorenzo strode into the room, followed by his secretary, Stefano. “I apologise for keeping you waiting. Alas, my business demands my almost constant attention.”

“The Magnificent Lorenzo does us honour by the mere fact of his presence.” The conjurer bowed.

“Please, let us dispense with the honorifics,” Lorenzo said. “We’re all friends here.”

“We are?” the conjurer asked.

“Indeed,” Lorenzo said. “I am Lorenzo, as you know, the young man is Niccolo Machiavelli and you are..?”

“The Doctor,” the conjurer replied.

Lorenzo frowned, but made no comment.

“I understand that you have been a guest of the Pazzi family, Doctor,” he said.

“If you mean that they held me against my will then that would be correct. How do you know all this?”

“This young man witnessed your abduction.” Lorenzo pointed to Niccolo. “He came to me for aid.”

“And I am grateful to him and to you for providing it. Now, if that’s all, I’ll be on my way.”

The Doctor turned to find his exit barred by the guards.

“Niccolo overheard some of your conversation in the inn,” Lorenzo continued. “He is of the opinion that the Pazzi are plotting against me. Is that true?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” the Doctor replied levelly.

“I think you do.” Lorenzo began pacing from one side of the room to the other. “It wouldn’t surprise me if there was a plot. The Pazzi are treacherous dogs at the best of times. If you ask me, my grandfather made a grave error of judgement in allying our family with theirs. Old age must have been affecting him more than we knew.”

“Maybe.” Lorenzo and the Doctor looked at Niccolo in shocked surprise, but neither was more surprised that Niccolo himself, who could not believe that he had spoken in Lorenzo’s presence.

“You wish to disagree?” Lorenzo asked angrily.

Niccolo recoiled.

“Let the boy speak,” the Doctor said. Lorenzo shot a fierce glance his way before waving Niccolo to continue.

“I was thinking,” he began slowly, “that perhaps your grandfather knew that the Pazzi family could not be trusted and that he made an alliance with them not to give them power, but to keep them close to him where he could keep an eye on them.”

“The boy has a keen political mind, eh, Doctor?” Lorenzo remarked.

“You have no idea,” the Doctor murmured.

“You have yet to tell me of this plot, Doctor,” Lorenzo prompted.

“What plot?” the Doctor replied.

“There are ways of loosening your tongue,” Lorenzo said, “few of which are pleasant.”

“They will not help.”

Lorenzo’s face turned crimson.

“You will tell me what I want to know,” he roared.

The Doctor looked back impassively and remained silence.

The doors to the room were flung open as Bianca de Medici stormed in.

“What is going on in here?” she demanded.

“What do you want?” Lorenzo shot back.

Bianca ignored him and walked over to Niccolo.

“Hello,” she said. “I’m Bianca. Who might you be?”

“Niccolo Machiavelli,” Niccolo stammered.

“Niccolo. What a charming name.” Her hair bounced as she turned her head to look back at the others. “And you must be the Doctor. I’ve heard so much about you.”

“You have?”

“Bianca?” Lorenzo raised his voice even higher in an attempt to regain control of the situation. “What is the meaning of this intrusion?”

“I came here to prevent you making a terrible mistake, brother dear,” Bianca replied with a smile.

Lorenzo scowled. “I was about to force this man to talk. Someone of your delicate constitution may want to be elsewhere when the screaming starts.”

“Lorenzo, has it occurred to you that no amount of torture can make him tell you what he doesn't know?”

“He was seen in the company of the Pazzi and their friends discussing a plot against me.”

“They mistook him for someone else. He doesn't know anything.”

Lorenzo's shoulders slumped and he adopted the pose of a petulant child. “And how do you know so much about this anyway?”

“Because I've been speaking to my husband,” Bianca replied. “The same husband you told me not to associate with anymore.”

“He's a Pazzi. He's as bad as the rest of them.”

“Guglielmo helped me to escape,” the Doctor interjected. He turned to Bianca. “Your husband is a very brave man.”

“Thank you, Doctor.” Bianca imperiously stared down her younger brother. “The Doctor is a victim of mistaken identity, nothing more.”

“Perhaps you are right,” Lorenzo conceded. “Or perhaps you are not. Still, was it not Cicero who said that a man should gain his ends through communication and persuasion rather than by force or treachery? Those are the tactics of the lion or the fox, not the virtuous man, wouldn't you agree, Doctor?”

“I'm sure your grandfather would have approved,” the Doctor replied.

“I am not my grandfather, but nevertheless you will come to no harm by my hand. However, since I may still come to harm by yours, directly or indirectly, I will take the advice of the boy Niccolo and keep you close to me, at least until I have succeeded in *persuading* you to tell me what I wish to know.”

* * * * *

“You helped the spy to escape.” Francesco towered over his brother Guglielmo who sat in the chair in front of him.

“No, I didn't.”

Jacopo folded his arms and studied his two nephews, happy to let Francesco take the lead in the interrogation.

“The Count of Montesecco has told us that you sent him out of the room so that you could speak to our prisoner in private,” Francesco continued. “Do you deny this?”

“What would be the point?” Guglielmo asked.

“So you admit to helping the spy to escape?”

“No, I admit to talking to him in private,” Guglielmo corrected patiently. “When I left, he was still in the room.”

Jacopo raised a hand to his face to hide his smile. He was impressed. He was getting old and, sooner or later, someone else would have to take his place as head of the family. Having no sons of his own, he turned to his nephews, but the eldest, Francesco, was little more than a blunt instrument. Up until now he had dismissed Guglielmo as well. The boy was smart, of that there was no doubt, but Jacopo had thought him soft. Now, though, he was proving to have a spine to go with his mind.

“You can go, Guglielmo,” Jacopo said quietly.

Gratefully, Guglielmo left the room. Francesco waited until he was gone before rounding on his uncle.

“Why did you stop me there? He's guilty. We both know that. His wife has made him soft on the Medici.”

“Perhaps,” Jacopo agreed, “but what would you do? He is still your brother and I will not countenance you spilling the blood of another member of our family.”

Deflated, Francesco slumped in the vacant chair. “What do we do now, Uncle? Our people report that the spy is back at the Palazzo Medici and by now he has probably told Lorenzo all that he knows. Damn Battista.”

“It is not entirely the Count's fault, Francesco,” Jacopo said. “However, Lorenzo now knows too much about our plans for us to go ahead.”

“But, Uncle...”

“No, Francesco, it's too risky. Perhaps, in a few months when this has all blown over we can try again, but for now we must abandon our plot.”

* * * * *

“I was hoping to see Leonardo here,” the Doctor said.

Lorenzo was showing him his studio where several of the artists who enjoyed his patronage were working.

“Leonardo?” Lorenzo said. “Do you know him? He shows a bit of potential.”

“You've no idea,” the Doctor replied. “I say, is that a Michelangelo?”

The Doctor scampered over to a bust.

“Art is one of my great pleasures, Doctor,” Lorenzo explained. “I have little talent myself, so I do what a can for those who do have a gift.”

“And in return you get to keep their best work,” the Doctor said. “Not a bad arrangement.”

“No, not bad at all.” Lorenzo turned to Niccolo who was following the pair. “Tell me, Niccolo, do you sketch or paint at all?”

“No, sir, no I don't,” Niccolo admitted.

“Pity,” Lorenzo replied. “So what does interest you?”

“Politics,” Niccolo replied. “I like to see how men like yourself run Florence.”

“You think *I* run Florence? The Lord Priors run Florence.”

“But you choose those Lord Priors,” Niccolo pointed out.

“But we have lists of eligible names and scrutiny commissions. Even then, the names of the new Lord Priors are drawn blind from a purse.”

“I have heard that the Magnificent Lorenzo can influence which names go in the purse. Once upon a time, there could be up to two thousand candidates for office. Now there are just fifty, all hand-picked by yourself.”

“Do you hear this boy, Doctor, and these wild notions he has?”

The Doctor was wearing a slight smile. “Not so wild, I think, Lorenzo.”

“I like you, boy.” Lorenzo laughed. “Perhaps I do have some say in who runs our city. But I admit to nothing.”

“That's how it should be,” Niccolo replied, beaming from both the praise and the knowledge that he was right.

Lorenzo put his arm around the boy.

“Tell me then, young Niccolo,” he said, “assuming for the moment that I am this character you believe, what do you think of the way I conduct my affairs?”

Niccolo hesitated. “I...I wouldn't want to say.”

“Go on, I won't be offended. After all, our discussion here is purely hypothetical, eh, Doctor?”

“Whatever you say, Lorenzo. Whatever you say.”

Niccolo cleared his throat. He looked at the Doctor who nodded encouragingly.

“Well, I think that you humour your rivals too much.”

“You mean the Pazzi.”

Niccolo looked at his feet, noting their scuffed condition with some embarrassment. “If we are talking hypothetically then I wouldn't want to say.”

“I revise my opinion, Doctor,” Lorenzo said. “I do not like this boy. I *love* him.”

“It seems to me,” Niccolo continued, strengthened by Lorenzo's words, “that while a leader should keep close watch on his enemies, he should never let them forget who holds the real power. If he does then they may decide he is weak.”

“And seek to replace him?” Lorenzo asked. “Are you saying that I encourage people to conspire against me?”

Niccolo chose not to reply, but he had already made his opinion clear.

“It would seem,” Lorenzo said, “if Niccolo is to be believed, that I have some work to be getting on with. Please excuse me, Doctor, Niccolo. Oh, and Doctor? You have the freedom to go anywhere in the palazzo, but you may not leave it. I tell you this for your own safety, please try and remember that.”

* * * * *

The Gonfalonier of Justice, Cesare Petrucci, was the head of the nine Lord Priors. He had his official chambers high in the battlemented government palace, a building located halfway between the cathedral to the north and the River Arno to the south. Petrucci was used to Lorenzo de Medici visiting the palace unannounced so barely glanced up from his paperwork when Lorenzo burst in. Petrucci signed two more documents, then, once the ink was dry, placed the stack of paperwork in a drawer in his desk, locking it securely and pocketing the key.

“What can I do for you today, Lorenzo?” he said. He betrayed no irritation at this intrusion. Gonfalonier's who were not prepared to tolerate the Medici did not tend to last long in the post.

“Always business, Cesare.” Lorenzo took a seat despite it not having been offered. His secretary remained standing. “We never get a chance to discuss your views on poetry or art.”

“You didn't come all this way to talk about art,” Petrucci replied.

“No, I did not.” Lorenzo leaned forward and lowered his voice conspiratorially. “When the Lord Priors were elected, there was a clear majority in the council who supported me. Now I hear that positions are shifting. In fact, I have heard it said that the council is now equally balanced between my supporters and my opponents, with you having the casting vote.”

“You know that I will always support you,” Petrucci said.

“Of course, of course,” Lorenzo agreed. “You have always been reliable. However, this shift in support concerns me, as I am sure it concerns you. I would like to know what you are doing about it.”

“What can I do? I cannot control how people think.”

“You are the head of the council,” Lorenzo said. “The others take their lead from you. If there is a shift in loyalty I have to wonder who is driving it...”

“Lorenzo, I have always been loyal to you,” Petrucci insisted. “I swear it.”

“Just remember that you keep this office on my sufferance, Cesare, that is all.”

* * * * *

“What do you want done about Petrucci?” Stefano asked. He was struggling to keep up with his master as he strode briskly away from the government palace.

“Leave Cesare for now,” Lorenzo said. “He's too afraid of me to be a real threat. Remind me, Stefano, Rondini was one of the Priors to have switched allegiances, wasn't he?”

“Yes, sir,” Stefano confirmed.

“And he owes the Medici Bank a large amount of money, does he not?”

“I'd have to check the exact figures, but yes, I believe he does.”

“Send someone round to reclaim the debt this afternoon.”

“You do realise that Rondini cannot afford to pay. This will finish him.” It was an observation, not a criticism.

“That will give our friend Cesare an excuse to get rid of him,” Lorenzo said, “and the identity of Rondini's replacement will be a test of Cesare's loyalty.”

Stefano smiled. “Very good, sir.”

“Perhaps it might be an opportunity for that Allori boy you like so much, eh, Stefano?” Lorenzo mused.

* * * * *

“Excuse me.”

The Doctor turned. He had been deep in conversation with one of the artists in Lorenzo's studio and had not the woman approach.

“You are a doctor?” Clarice asked.

“Among other things.”

“Then would you mind looking in on my brother-in-law? He is confined to his bed with fever.”

Clarice did not wait for an answer, instead spinning on her heel and leading the way to Giuliano's bedchamber. The Doctor shrugged and followed.

“Your brother-in-law...that would be Giuliano, wouldn't it?” he asked as they ascended the stairs.

Clarice nodded.

“Does Lorenzo let his younger brother try his hand at the family business?”

“Lorenzo wanted his brother to be a cardinal,” Clarice replied hesitatingly. “He had hoped that my family's influence in Rome might help with that.”

“I take it he was wrong.”

“My husband is out of favour with the Pope,” Clarice replied.

“I see,” the Doctor said. Clarice did not elaborate.

Giuliano de Medici lay in his bed, his skin deathly pale. Bianca sat next to him, cradling his hands in hers. She was entertaining him with city gossip and Giuliano did his best to laugh and gasp in the right places, though his voice kept catching in his throat.

“So this is the handsome Giuliano all the Florentine girls are talking about,” the Doctor said.

“Doctor,” Bianca said. “I'm glad you came.”

The Doctor nodded to her, then turned back to Giuliano. “Now, let's take a look at you.”

The Doctor carried out his examination quickly, but thoroughly, cursing under his breath the lack of medical instruments he had to work with.

“I'm going to die, aren't I, Doctor,” Giuliano moaned.

“Not from the flu, you're not,” the Doctor assured him. “You'll be back on your feet in no time, but only if you get plenty of rest.”

“That will hardly be a problem,” Giuliano said. “My brother has never given me any work to do before. Why should he start now?”

Clarice tutted from the doorway.

“All men are babies,” she remarked.

* * * * *

“They said I'd find you here.” Francesco de Pazzi stepped quietly into the domed Cappella de Pazzi off of the church of Santa Croce. “Looking for divine inspiration.”

“Perhaps.” Jacopo broke off his study of the roundels on the ceiling and turned to his nephew. “How do you think history will judge me, Francesco? Now, don't look at me like that. I'm getting old and that entitles me to worry about such things.”

“Rondini came looking for you,” Francesco said, switching away from a subject he found uncomfortable. “The Medici are reclaiming all their debts, debts he cannot afford to settle.”

“He should have thought of that before he took out the loans,” Jacopo replied. “However, I take it you think that there is more to this than just business.”

“Rondini is known to speak up against the Medici among the Lord Priors,” Francesco said. “I’ve told him that we will lend him the money he needs to pay off the Medici.”

“Then you can go back and tell him that you were mistaken and that we will not be able to help him after all.”

“Uncle? If we don’t do something then we’re handing more power to the Lorenzo.”

“I know, Francesco,” Jacopo replied wearily. “Believe me, I know. But Lorenzo already suspects us of plotting against him. How do you think he’ll react if we knowingly oppose him now? No, we must let him have his little victories until we are ready and he is complacent. And may history forgive me for my caution.”

* * * * *

“Thank you for looking after my brother,” Bianca said.

She, Clarice, Niccolo, Clarice’s seven year-old son Piero and the Doctor were dining in the vast dining-hall of the Palazzo Medici. Lorenzo was still out on business so they had chosen to eat without him. Piero kept trying to engage Niccolo in conversation, but the older boy thought the younger to be annoyingly juvenile and ignored him, preferring instead to eavesdrop on the adult’s conversation.

“It was the least I can do given all you and your husband have done for me,” the Doctor replied.

“Perhaps, but you can’t be happy about being kept here against your will.”

“That’s Lorenzo’s doing,” the Doctor said, “and I can’t hold either you or Giuliano responsible for that. Besides, I’ve been confined in much worse places. This food is delightful. My compliments to your chef.”

“I had him brought all the way from Rome, Doctor,” Clarice explained. “He used to cook for me when I was little and I missed his art.”

“Clarice hasn’t exactly taken to our Florentine cuisine,” Bianca said. “As a daughter of nobility, she thinks she’s too good for us, isn’t that right, Clarice?”

Clarice looked down at her food, blushing scarlet.

“And by marrying into Clarice’s family, does Lorenzo think he is too good for you as well?” the Doctor asked.

“Lorenzo thinks he is too good for everyone, Doctor,” Bianca replied with a laugh. “Surely you’ve realised that by now.”

“Bianca!”

An expression of delighted surprise on her face, Bianca sprang to her feet as Guglielmo de Pazzi entered the hall. Wrapping his arms around his wife, Guglielmo lifted her up into the air and spun her around before kissing her on the lips. Bianca returned his affections with equal vigour. The Doctor watched them both with an amused smile on his face. Clarice looked away, embarrassed.

“What are you doing here, Guglielmo?” Bianca asked when she caught her breath.

“Do I need a reason to see my darling wife?”

“Lorenzo would have a fit if he saw you here.”

“Then it’s a good thing he’s out.” Guglielmo silenced any more of his wife’s concerns with another lingering kiss. Then he turned to the Doctor. “Doctor, I have the best of news.”

“Really? Do tell.”

“Uncle Jacopo has called off his plot,” Guglielmo explained. “He’s still convinced that you’re a spy and, since you’ve undoubtedly told Lorenzo all that you know, he thinks it’s too risky to try anything. Isn’t that wonderful news?”

“Quite.” The smile vanished from the Doctor’s face. “Well, I suspect you two have a lot to talk about and I’d be intruding. If you’ll excuse me...”

And with that, the Doctor got up and hurriedly left the hall. Niccolo hurried after him.

“Are you all right, Doctor?” he asked when he finally caught up.

“No, no I'm very far from being all right,” the Doctor replied. “I keep telling everyone that I'm not supposed to be here.”

“Well, now that there is no plot, Messer Lorenzo is bound to see that too and let you go,” Niccolo pointed out.

The Doctor shook his head. “No, no, no, no, no. You're missing the point, Niccolo. I shouldn't be here at all. Not in Florence and not at this time. You heard, Guglielmo. The only reason Jacopo has called off his conspiracy is because of me. If I wasn't here then the plot would go ahead.”

“But that's a good thing, isn't it?” Niccolo said, not comprehending. “Surely you don't want the Pazzi to attack Lorenzo, do you?”

“Oh, Niccolo. Niccolo, Niccolo, Niccolo, I wish it were that simple.” The Doctor sat down on the staircase and placed his head in his hands. “Tell me, what would you do if you knew the future?”

“You mean like those astrologers in the market? Father says they are all charlatans.” Niccolo sat down one step below the Doctor.

“I'd be inclined to agree with your father,” the Doctor replied, “but lets pretend for a moment that you do know what's going to happen. What would you do if you saw that events weren't happening the way they were supposed to.”

“Well, I'd try and change it back, I suppose.”

“Even if you knew that, if you did so, people would die.”

Niccolo looked thoughtful for a moment. “I suppose it would depend on what I thought the future was going to be like and whether or not the changes would be an improvement.”

“But how would you know?” the Doctor asked. “How could you say how events will turn out in ten years, or fifty, or a hundred, or a thousand?”

“But surely fortune and God dictate how events turn out anyway,” Niccolo replied. “We cannot change our destinies.”

“Can't we?” The Doctor studied Niccolo for a long moment. “Suppose, just for a moment, that there is a boy growing up in these turbulent times. He's an impressionable young man and his character and opinions will be shaped by events going on around him. Later in life, he will put his opinions down in writing and so powerful and well thought out are his conclusions that people will still quote them hundreds of years from now and his name will be part of the language. But suppose that those events that shaped him turned out differently. The boy grows up with a different set of experiences and passes into obscurity. Those millions of people who might have been touched by his writings will have to go without and the future will be a very different place without them.

“Don't I owe it to that boy to ensure that events transpire the way they are supposed to, to give destiny a helping hand, if you will?”

“I suppose so.”

“But given that I shouldn't be here, do I have the right to interfere, especially since my actions will result in so many deaths?” the Doctor said. “On the other hand, given that I've interfered already, do I have the right to turn my back and not try and fix my mistake?”

“I've always been told that fortune is a lady,” Niccolo said thoughtfully. “If that's true, I imagine that she favours men who are young and bold.”

The Doctor smiled. “Well, since you've got the young part covered, I guess I shall have to be bold. I'll need paper and ink.”

* * * * *

“Uncle, Uncle,” Francesco called out. “You have a message from the King of Naples.”

“Well give it here then,” Jacopo said gruffly as he took the folded paper from his nephew.

Examining the seal, he had to admit that it did look like that of Ferrante of Naples, but it was too smudged for him to be certain. He broke the seal and examined the contents, trying to keep his emotions from playing across his face. The letter was definitely from Ferrante. Jacopo recognised the handwriting and the signature. It was unusual for King Ferrante to write himself, preferring to

dictate his missives to a secretary, but, under the circumstances, Jacopo could see why he would not have wanted to trust this information to an underling.

“What's your name, boy?” he asked the messenger standing behind Francesco.

“Niccolo, sir,” the boy replied.

“And have you travelled all the way from Naples to bring me this, Niccolo?”

The boy nodded.

“Then go to the kitchens and see that you are fed and watered before you make the trip back. You can tell your master that I have noted his words and will act accordingly.”

Niccolo bowed and hurried out.

“I need a fire, Francesco,” Jacopo barked when they were alone. “Quickly, man.”

Francesco got down on his hands and knees and coaxed a fire in the grate. Jacopo tossed the letter into the flames and watched the paper curl and burn.

“King Ferrante writes to encourage me to act against the Medici with urgency,” Jacopo told his nephew. “Apparently his troops are on their way to support us.”

“Does that mean that our plot is back on?” Francesco asked enthusiastically.

Jacopo sighed. “With both the Pope and the King of Naples breathing down my neck, how can I say no?”

* * * * *

“Clarice, my darling,” Lorenzo kissed his wife on the cheek.

“How was your day?” Clarice asked as she greeted him at the door. “I take it from your expression that it went well.”

“It ended well at any rate,” Lorenzo replied. “You'll have to warn your cook that we'll be having guests on Sunday.”

“Really?” Clarice asked. “Anyone I know?”

“The Cardinal of San Giorgio,” Lorenzo replied, beaming. “He wants to see my art collection. Don't you see what this means, Clarice? He's the Pope's nephew. This is our chance to get back in the Holy Father's good graces.”

He kissed his wife again.

“Shall we go and celebrate?” he asked slyly.

As the pair ascended the stairs, neither noticed the Doctor watching from the shadows and smiling grimly.

* * * * *

Jacopo surveyed the Count of Montesecco and the small band of mercenaries he had gathered at the Palazzo Pazzi. More soldiers, he was promised, were waiting just beyond the city walls. It was early on the morning of Sunday, 26 April 1478, the fifth Sunday after Easter and, if Jacopo and his conspirators had his way, the last day of the Medici's reign over Florence.

“This is the plan,” Jacopo began. “Lorenzo has already agreed to a visit by the Cardinal of San Giorgio, even going so far as to invite him for dinner after Mass. Naturally, as part of the Cardinal's entourage, we shall also attend. Lorenzo won't be expecting an attack in his own house so we should have no trouble dispatching both him and his brother.”

“It won't work,” Francesco said.

“What do you mean it won't work?” Jacopo said. “Have you any idea how long I've been working on this?”

“Doesn't matter, Uncle,” Francesco replied. “It still won't work. Haven't you heard? Giuliano is very ill. He won't be attending lunch today.”

“Even though the Cardinal will be there?”

“Even though.”

Jacopo swore. "We can't afford to delay our plans any longer. I'm already under pressure from King Ferrante to act. And we have to strike both brothers at the same time or we give the other a chance to prepare for us."

"What are you thinking, Uncle?" Francesco asked.

"It will have to be at the duomo, during Mass. You, Francesco, will be responsible for Giuliano."

"I won't fail you, Uncle."

"You'd better not," Jacopo said. "We only get one chance at this, remember that. Count, I'm trusting you to take care of Lorenzo."

"No," Giovan Battista replied.

"No?"

"I won't spill blood on sacred ground," Battista insisted.

"Not even to free this city from the Medici?" Jacopo asked.

"No."

Archbishop Salviatti stepped forward. "Battista, you know we have the blessing of the Pope in this. Any sin you may commit to achieve this noble end will be forgiven. You have his word on that."

"I will not do it," Battista repeated, "and that is my final word on the matter."

"Very well." Jacopo threw up his hands. "Is there any man here who will perform this deed?"

Two priests in the Archbishop's retinue spoke up. "We will do it, if the Archbishop promises us absolution."

"You shall have it," Salviatti promised.

"Good," Jacopo said. "The Archbishop and I will leave Mass early."

"I can say that I must pay a visit to my ailing mother," Salviatti replied. "She has the constitution of an ox, but no one else need know that."

"You will be able to take the government palace?" Jacopo asked.

"If you can rally the citizens of Florence to our banner," Salviatti replied.

"Then it is agreed," Jacopo pronounced with finality.

* * * * *

The Doctor had borrowed some of Giuliano's clothes for Mass that morning. They were a better fit than those he had found in the TARDIS, which he suspected were last worn by an earlier, larger incarnation, and of better quality. He was preening himself when Niccolo arrived. The boy was out of breath, having run all the way to the palazzo from his home on the other side of the city.

"Niccolo, how good to see you," the Doctor said, drawing up a chair. "Sit down and get your breath back. Your parents don't mind you assisting me?"

"I've told them I'm working for the Magnificent Lorenzo."

"And they believed you?"

"Well, not until I showed them that letter you convinced him to write for me," Niccolo admitted, "but then they could hardly refuse, could they?"

"Niccolo, what I'm going to ask you to do could be dangerous," the Doctor said. "You don't have to do it if you don't want to."

"Doctor, spending time with you and Lorenzo is far more interesting than reading about dead Roman poets," Niccolo replied. "I'll do whatever you want."

"Never neglect the classics, Niccolo," the Doctor scolded him gently. "Very well, this is what I need you to do."

After he had dismissed Niccolo, the Doctor rejoined the rest of Lorenzo's party as they made their way to the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. Guglielmo de Pazzi walked beside his wife, much to Lorenzo's annoyance.

"Will Giuliano not be joining us?" the Doctor asked Lorenzo.

"He is still very ill," Lorenzo replied, "so I have told him to stay in bed, just as you advised."

Francesco de Pazzi watched the Medici procession leave the palazzo, noting with some concern that Giuliano was not present. As soon as the procession was out of sight, he hurried across the street. One of the guards tried to stop him entering the palace, but Francesco explained that he was just there to pay his respects to Giuliano, who he had heard was terribly ill, so the guard let him in. He found Giuliano lying on his bed, sweat drenching his pale skin. For a moment Francesco wondered whether or not to simply leave and let nature take its course, but his uncle had taught him to leave nothing to chance.

“Giuliano, my brother, I came as soon as I heard,” Francesco said, kneeling at the bedside. “You look terrible.”

“I feel worse,” Giuliano moaned.

“Will you not go to Mass?” Francesco asked.

“I’m too weak,” Giuliano replied. “Lorenzo has told me to stay here in bed.”

“Well, I don’t want to criticise your brother, but don’t you think it might be a good idea to go,” Francesco continued. “The priest’s blessing might be just what you need.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Giuliano conceded.

“Here, let me help you,” Francesco continued, looking out clothes for Giuliano to wear. “Don’t worry about being too weak to walk all the way to the duomo. I will carry you if I have to.”

Giuliano reached out and clasped Francesco’s hand.

“You’re a good friend, Francesco,” he said.

* * * * *

Apollonia Capponi craned her neck to get a good look at Maria Bardi, Lorenzo’s choice for a wife for her son. She was still unimpressed by what she saw. If only there was a way to convince Lorenzo to revise his opinion without offending him. She spied Lorenzo on the southern side of the cathedral by the old sacristy. He was talking to a man Apollonia did not recognise, but if Lorenzo considered the man worthy of his time then perhaps Apollonia should get him to introduce her.

Giuliano de Medici was not with his brother and Apollonia cast her eyes about in search of him. There he was, entering the cathedral through the west doors. He looked unsteady on his feet and he was being supported as he walked by Francesco de Pazzi. Apollonia was pleased to see that the young man was prepared to help a man in need despite the rivalry between their two houses. Perhaps that generation had some promise after all. Francesco glanced across the cathedral towards Lorenzo and Apollonia fancied that she saw some sort of silent communication pass between Francesco and the two priests hovering behind the elder Medici.

Then Francesco yelled, “Here, traitor!”

Pulling a dagger from his rows, Francesco stabbed furiously at Giuliano again and again.

Apollonia screamed.

* * * * *

Apollonia was not the only one to start screaming. Cries and shouts filled the cathedral as panic began to spread throughout the congregation. Few were close enough to Giuliano and Francesco to have seen what had happened, but everyone knew that something terrible had occurred.

“What is going on?” Lorenzo demanded just as one of the priests behind him grabbed him by the shoulder.

Lorenzo leaped forward, away from the priest, and it was this that saved him as the blade that was meant to have killed him was only able to nick his ear. Drawing his own short sword, he turned and, lightning quick, parried the blows the two priests rained down on him.

“I didn’t know anything, I swear,” Guglielmo was shouting. “They said they weren’t going ahead with it. I had nothing to do with this. Nothing. You must believe me.”

“Just shut up, Guglielmo. Please,” Lorenzo called back.

One of his friends, Francesco Nori, had stepped forward to help, but had received a knife in the stomach for his trouble and now lay bleeding on the marble floor at Lorenzo's feet.

The Doctor picked up Nori's discarded sword.

"Get to safety, Lorenzo," he said, disarming one of the priests with a series of deft strokes. "I'll handle things here."

"But Giuliano?" Lorenzo began.

"Just go!" the Doctor snapped. The other priest was advancing now and the Doctor fought to position himself between the assassin and his target. One of the priest's thrusts got through his defence and the Doctor felt a gash open on his cheek. The Doctor feinted to the left and, when the priest raised his buckler to counter the strike, the Doctor change direction, slashing him across the back of his hand and forcing him to drop his sword.

Lorenzo leaped over the low wooden rail into the octagonal choir and then ran in front of the altar to the safety of the north sacristy. His allies slammed the heavy bronze doors closed behind him.

Francesco de Pazzi, sword in one hand, dagger in the other, advanced on the Doctor.

"You!" he spat.

"So it would seem," the Doctor replied, circling his opponent.

"Where is Lorenzo?" Francesco demanded.

"Safe," the Doctor replied.

"Tell me!" Francesco lunged with his sword, but the Doctor parried easily. When Francesco brought his dagger up to stab the Doctor in the side, the Doctor used his heavy robes to trap the blade and pull Francesco in close.

"Give it up, Francesco," he hissed.

"Never!"

Francesco butted the Doctor in the face and he tumbled back, stumbling over the wooden rail and ending up lying on his back in the choir. Francesco pressed his advantage, swinging his sword down in a large arc, putting as much force behind the blow as he could muster. The Doctor rolled to one side, and the wood of one of the stalls cracked and splintered as Francesco's blade bit into it. The weight of the blow carried it deep and Francesco was unable to pull his sword free.

The Doctor regained his feet and extended his sword in front of him. Abandoning his own sword, Francesco tossed his dagger from one hand to the other.

"You can't win, Francesco," the Doctor warned. "Get out of here while you still can."

"Not while you still live, spy!"

Francesco roared and, like a bull, charged the Doctor. The Doctor gracefully sidestepped, stabbing Francesco in the leg as he ran passed. Francesco stumbled away, trailing blood. The Doctor chose not to finish him, instead taking a step back and raising his sword in salute.

"Messer Francesco, we should leave," one of the priests said, placing a hand on Francesco's arm. Francesco angrily shook him off.

"Your time will come," he promised the Doctor before hobbling out of the cathedral.

"It usually does," the Doctor murmured softly to himself.

He hurried over to the west doors where Giuliano lay bleeding. It had seemed so straightforward in the abstract, weighing up Giuliano's life against human history, but now... He knelt on the cold marble floor and began examining Giuliano to see what he could do.

"Don't bother," Giuliano said weakly. "I know the wounds are mortal."

The Doctor peeled away Giuliano's blood soaked clothes and winced as he counted the number of cuts to the young man's chest. Giuliano was right, he was very close to death.

"I wish there was something I could do," the Doctor said.

"Doctor, I have a son," Giuliano said. "Illegitimate, perhaps, but still my flesh and blood. Bianca and Guglielmo tell me you can see the future."

"After a fashion," the Doctor admitted.

"Then tell me, Doctor, what will become of my boy?"

“Your son has quite a career ahead of him,” the Doctor said. “He will become first a cardinal and then, many years from now, he will be Pope.”

“Pope?” Giuliano smiled. “That is good.”

* * * * *

Someone was hammering on the bronze doors of the sacristy.

“Sigismondo, go see who it is,” Lorenzo ordered one of his allies.

Sigismondo climbed the spiral staircase up to the organ gallery so that he could look out over the cathedral.

“It's your friend, the Doctor,” he called down. “Everyone else has gone.”

“Doctor,” Lorenzo said, heaving open the doors himself. “Where is my brother?”

“I'm sorry, Lorenzo,” the Doctor said. “Giuliano is dead.”

* * * * *

Salviatti hurried into the government palace ahead of his soldiers. As an Archbishop they could hardly refuse him entry. He headed straight to the office of the Gonfalonier of Justice.

“Cesare Petrucci,” he said, opening the doors without bothering to know, “I am Archbishop Salviatti of Pisa.”

“I know who you are,” Petrucci said, rising from his seat behind his desk.

“I bring urgent news from the Pope,” Salviatti continued. “He wishes me to inform you that he wants to convey his favour on your son in Rome and...”

“I know why you have come,” Petrucci interrupted.

“You...you do?” Salviatti asked. This was not going as he had anticipated.

“This boy came to me with word that you would be coming,” Petrucci continued and for the first time Salviatti noticed Niccolo standing quietly in the corner.

In desperation, Salviatti reached for a weapon, but Petrucci was faster. He grabbed the Archbishop by the hair and threw him down the stairs to where the guards were waiting.

“Lock him up,” Petrucci ordered his men.

“But my soldiers,” Salviatti began.

“Have already been taken care of,” Petrucci assured him. He turned back to his men. “Sound the alarm bells. We must rouse the city.”

Returning to his office, Petrucci closed the door behind him.

“Your warning was timely,” he said to Niccolo. “Tell Lorenzo that I hope my loyalty is no longer in doubt.”

* * * * *

Lorenzo was still weeping for his brother when he got back to the Palazzo Medici.

“They are animals,” he yelled. “They conspired against me and they killed my brother. Animals! I'll kill them all, every last one of them.” He spotted Guglielmo standing with Bianca. “Starting with him!”

Lorenzo drew his sword and advanced.

“Please, Lorenzo, no. I beg you.” Tears streaming down her face, Bianca threw herself to the floor and wrapped her arms around her brother's legs.

“Get off of me,” Lorenzo protested.

“I won't let you hurt him,” Bianca cried. “He's done nothing wrong.”

“He's a Pazzi,” Lorenzo roared. “That's crime enough.”

“He's my husband!”

“Leave him be, Lorenzo,” the Doctor said, stepping in front of Guglielmo. “Guglielmo was put in an impossible position, trying to be loyal both to you and to his own family and doing his best to

betray neither. He has never done anything to harm you and it is beneath you to punish him merely for an accident of birth. Out of respect for your sister and as a favour to me, I beg you to let him live.”

“I had my doubts about you, Doctor,” Lorenzo said, “but you proved yourself today. Very well, you shall have your wish.”

“Thank you,” the Doctor said.

“However, I intend to wipe all traces of the hateful Pazzi family from this city,” Lorenzo continued. “If Guglielmo wishes to live then he must leave Florence tonight, never to return.”

“As you wish,” Guglielmo said, bowing to Lorenzo.

“I will be going with him,” Bianca told her brother.

“I will miss you sister,” Lorenzo said.

“And I you,” she replied.

“Good.” The Doctor clapped his hands. “Well, if that's sorted, I have a favour to ask.”

“I know what you're going to ask, Doctor, and the answer is no,” Lorenzo said. “I should be the one to confront Jacopo.”

“Lorenzo, your place is here,” the Doctor said. “You don't yet realise how far reaching this conspiracy is. You have some powerful enemies and this could still lead to war. You need to start making plans. Let me settle this one problem for you.”

“Very well, Doctor,” Lorenzo sighed. “I have wronged you in the past, so I will give you my trust now. Take my horse. He's the fastest in Florence.”

“Thank you.” The Doctor turned to leave, then paused. “One last thing. I don't suppose any of you have seen a blue box about so high.”

“My uncle has it,” Guglielmo said. “It's in the courtyard of his stables.”

“Thank you.” The Doctor bowed deeply. “Lorenzo, I wish you luck and success.”

* * * * *

Guglielmo joined the Doctor in the stables just as he was mounting Lorenzo's stallion.

“Doctor,” he called, “this is what you couldn't tell me when you were my uncle's prisoner, wasn't it?”

The Doctor nodded.

“Was there nothing you could have done?”

“I wish there was,” the Doctor replied, “but I can't change history, not one line.”

“I understand,” Guglielmo said, “I think. Thank you for everything you've done for us. If there is anything I can do to repay you...”

“You're a good man, Guglielmo,” the Doctor replied. “There aren't enough like you about. If you stay just as you are, that will be payment enough.”

Then he rode away.

* * * * *

Jacopo rode into the Piazza della Signoria at the head of one hundred mercenaries, drawing to a halt in front of the bell tower of the government palace. The bell was still tolling, but Jacopo raised his voice so that he would be heard above it.

“People and Liberty!” he yelled.

He had hoped to rally the citizens, but instead all he brought forth was a rain of missiles hurled down by the Lord Priors and their guardsmen from the crenellated battlements.

“People and Liberty!” Jacopo called out again. “I call upon you to rise up against Medici and take back your city!”

Still no one came.

Then one horse and rider trotted into the square, taking up a position between Jacopo and the government palace.

“Doctor,” Jacopo said.

“Messer Jacopo,” the Doctor replied, inclining his head in greeting.

“And so the spy finally shows his true colours.”

The Doctor shook his head. “I was never a spy, Jacopo, but circumstances forced my hand.”

“As they forced mine,” Jacopo replied. “What I do now, I do for my city and her people.”

“Her people?” the Doctor repeated. “And where are her people now, Jacopo, why aren't they rallying around you?”

“They're afraid,” Jacopo replied. “Uncertain. They're waiting to see which way the wind blows.”

“It doesn't blow in your favour, I'm afraid, Jacopo,” the Doctor told him. “Lorenzo still lives.”

The blood drained from Jacopo's face.

“When the people think of you, they'll think of a conspirator and a murderer,” the Doctor said, “one who had no compunction about spilling blood on holy ground.”

“I had no choice,” Jacopo protested.

“Worse, they'll think of you as a failure,” the Doctor continued. “Do you really expect them to rally round you now?”

“We can still win this,” Jacopo said. “We can still take control of the government.”

“With the help of those reinforcements from Naples?” the Doctor asked. “They aren't coming. Your nephew lies wounded at home. Archbishop Salviatti has already been arrested. All that's left of your conspiracy is right here in this square.”

“I am still not defeated,” Jacopo protested. “The people will make the right choice.”

“Really?” The Doctor raised an eyebrow, then yelled at the top of his voice, “Palle, Palle! I am for the Medici!”

Those on the battlements of the government palace took up the cry.

“Palle, Palle! I am for the Medici!”

Then Florentines living around the square, and then those further afield, stuck their heads out of their windows to echo the sentiment.

“Palle, Palle! I am for the Medici!”

“It's over, Jacopo,” the Doctor said softly. “You've lost. Lorenzo is out for blood. If you want to live, my advice is to get out of the city now. I'm sorry.”

“The House of the Medici deserves to fall,” Jacopo said. “They *will* fall.”

“Yes,” the Doctor told him, “but not today.”

“Did I ever have a chance?” Jacopo asked.

“Yes,” the Doctor replied. “Yes, I think you did.”

Jacopo de Pazzi nodded, then turned his horse and galloped straight for the city gates, his mercenaries following in his wake.

* * * * *

Niccolo Machiavelli was waiting for the Doctor when he arrived at the Pazzi stables. The building was quiet, Lorenzo's allies having already swept through the place, arresting Francesco and his co-conspirators.

“Niccolo,” the Doctor said as he dismounted, “what are you doing here?”

“Lorenzo told me I might find you here,” Niccolo replied.

“I'm glad you came,” the Doctor said. “You can return this horse to Lorenzo. I'd hate his last impression of me to be that I was a thief.”

“Doctor,” Niccolo began, “I've been thinking a lot about what you said. You set Giuliano up to be killed, didn't you?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Why?”

“To guarantee the future,” the Doctor replied. “What do you think Lorenzo will do now?”

“Well, he'll want to round up all of the conspirators, I guess,” Niccolo replied.

“He'll take revenge on all of the Pazzi family,” the Doctor corrected. “He will seize their wealth and property and obliterate all traces of them from Florence. More than that, he will use this attempted coup as an excuse to get rid of all of his other enemies and to push through the political reforms he wants in the name of his and Florence's safety and security. If you think he runs the city now, you haven't seen anything yet.”

“So you did all this just to make Lorenzo even more powerful than he already is?”

“Yes, because when the Florentine people realise just how much of their freedom they have given up to protect themselves from conspirators and enemies in Rome or Naples or wherever else Lorenzo says they are, they'll grow to hate the Medici and eventually they will overthrow them.”

“So the Pazzi will get their way after all?” Niccolo said.

“Yes, I suppose so,” the Doctor agreed, “but I've said too much already.”

“I still don't understand why,” Niccolo said.

“At this point in history, Florence may be the most important city in the world,” the Doctor said. “This is the heart of the Renaissance. So many artists and scientists and thinkers are either born here or will come and work here. Those people who ply their craft in Lorenzo's workshop, people like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, their vision is going to last for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. But part of what makes them great is the city itself and the way their environment develops. That's why it's important that things happen this way, Niccolo.”

“And that's why Giuliano had to die?”

“I wish there had been another way,” the Doctor said earnestly, “I really do, but the world does not work the way your classical scholars would like it to. Sometimes a man must learn from the beasts, displaying the courage of the lion or the cunning of a fox, no matter what Cicero or his ilk may have said. They dreamed of a perfect world, but this world is far from perfect and until it becomes so you have to be ruthless to stand a chance among other ruthless men.”

“I think I understand, Doctor,” Niccolo said slowly.

“You are a smart young man, with quite an aptitude for politics, if I may say so.” The Doctor put a hand on Niccolo's shoulder. “It will serve you well. Godspeed, Niccolo Machiavelli, it has been a privilege and a pleasure meeting you.”

The Doctor opened the door to the TARDIS and stepped inside. Niccolo waited for him to come out and his draw stopped when the box faded from view with a trumpeting roar. Perhaps the Doctor was a real magician after all.

DUNCAN JOHNSON

You may remember Duncan Johnson from his contribution to the Season 32 omnibus (he can hope, can't he?), but he started his involvement with TDWP here in Season 33. He feels that this temporal chicanery is entirely appropriate when writing about a Time Lord and invites you to join him at his website, www.themysteriousplanet.com, where he persists his penchant for writing series out of typical chronological order.

