

TURMOIL IN THE RENAISSANCE

A Historical Fiction of
Ludovico Sforza – Duke of Milan

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This is a work of historical fiction, based on actual persons and events. The author has taken creative liberty with many details to enhance the reader's experience.

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First Edition

Dedication

To Diane, My love and companion through life

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Gianni stood nearby, tension clearly visible on his face, pacing from time to time, trying to remember his mother and father that he had not seen for several years, trying to garner the courage that he knew they would exhibit if they were in a similar situation. But the experiences of the last few months were unique to him and would certainly be unique to them. There was no history for him to emulate. He could try to imitate Giorgio, but Giorgio, sitting nearby on a rock nonchalantly looking at the interplay of a flock of swifts that were circling in the sky like pieces of paper caught in the wind, was unique. Gianni could not possibly believe that he could produce that imperceptible combination of indifference and conviction that Giorgio wore like a thin skin appended to his frame.

The three were followed from the monastery, this time by one man. They had discovered him soon after they left the monastery but decided to wait on any action until they could be sure he was alone. They surmised that he was sent by the same people who sent the other men after them. It was impossible to keep the tracker alive. There could be no one who could know their movements and certainly no one who could associate their trip to Florence with their subsequent assumption of the Regency. If their trip became apparent later, it would be of no consequence. Giorgio made quick work of the man, ambushing him and with one powerful swipe of his dagger had his blood streaming onto the ground, staining the brown earth.

Ludovico woke in early morning, the sky still darkened with night and not yet easing into daybreak, birds not yet singing their way into morning. The plan was to go into effect before dawn. Word had been sent the previous

evening that Cicco and Sergio, captain of the guard, should be detained in their homes as the plan stipulated. Neither man was guarded, and Ludovico's men quickly entered their houses. Cicco was already awake working at his desk, which startled the intruders at first, but they recovered and constrained Cicco with ease. He tried futilely to resist but his age promptly showed, and his resistance faded like a lioness in heat.

Meanwhile, Giorgio and Franco, a long-time associate, tried to break stealthily into Sergio's home. The captain, however, was known for his perceptiveness and forcefulness. He needed only one creak in the old wooden flooring to jump from bed and grasp the sword hanging on the bedpost. Surprised by the quickness of Sergio's response, Giorgio swiftly engaged him, rushing to confront him on the stairway. Swords clashed with the sound of metal, both men maneuvering on the stairway for best advantage. Sergio nicked Giorgio slightly as he jumped two steps to the floor, tripping over a foot stool, a trickle of blood staining his shirt. The captain tried to make his way to the door, but was at first prevented by Giorgio's accomplice, but he easily slew him, first with a parry move to counter his attack, then with a flunge move to leave him lying on the floor for a few moments before expiring. Sergio ran into the breaking daylight, then turned to confront Giorgio chasing after him. The captain was not one to retreat from an opponent, honor being as important to him as duty. The fight moved outside and regained momentum by the brightly flowered garden fronting the house before advancing into the garden. Birds were singing, unaware of the death contest taking place beneath them. Finally, Sergio, exhausted from combat, barely able to lift his arm,

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was put down by a riposte that plunged Giorgio's sword into his stomach. He fell to his knees before falling face down onto the ground. Giorgio, also exhausted, first fell to his knees before raising himself and finding a chair in the house on which to rest.

Ludovico and his men, separated into two groups to reduce suspicion, entered the palace through a servants' entrance far from the main rooms of the palace. Two of his men, dressed as guards kept the entrance free of pedestrians. Once in the palace, each group advanced by different routes to Bona's room and Gian Galeazzo's adjacent room. The six security guards in the hall had one of Ludovico's men in their group and, once he glimpsed Ludovico's men walking in step down the hall, grabbed one of the guards, holding him at knifepoint. The remaining four guards at first lowered their lances in unison and briefly considered resisting Ludovico's men but then spotted the second group approaching from the opposite direction. They decided that their only recourse was to surrender to Ludovico.

Ludovico stood before Bona's room and, oddly, knocked before entering. Bona stood from her desk, only now aware of what was occurring but, nevertheless, looked sternly at Ludovico, fear slowly seeping onto her face from a depository that had never before been tapped. Her life had been one of luxury, first as daughter of Louis, Duke of Savoy, then as Duchess of Milan.

"Ludovico, what is the meaning of this intrusion," she said indignantly, quickly playing possible scenarios through her mind.

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“Good morning, dear sister-in-law. I have returned to replace you as advisor to Gian Galeazzo.”

“This is nonsense, Ludovico, you have no standing here and no support among the people. You will not prevail in this ludicrous adventure. You must know that.”

“Ah, but dear Bona, I will. You have no recourse but to yield your authority to me. And I advise that you do without delay.”

“Cicco will soon have my forces here to rout you and your men and the people will not allow it. Your stint as Regent will last only a few hours, then it will be you who will have his body swinging in a hangman’s noose. I hope you enjoy the wind blowing through your dead body as your guts are exposed.”

“Yes, Cicco, the man who humiliated me just last year. Well, he is now in my custody, no doubt considering his fate. And the people.... you should walk the streets on occasion, Bona, to see how your subjects have turned on you in just the last months of your regency. You should have been more concerned with their welfare.”

Bona paced slowly around the room contemplating her next move, not looking at Ludovico. She was not yet ready to bargain with Ludovico, unsure as yet of how severe her position was but also not quite prepared to concede her position. Outwardly, she held her back stiff, her head high as becomes a Duchess. “What are your plans for me, then? And what of Gian Galeazzo?”

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“Do not fear, Bona, I merely want to guide Gian Galeazzo. I have no plans of disposing of you, if that’s what you are thinking. You can live your life here with your son, that does not have to change, provided that you adhere to my authority.”

Bona understood that her position was now undermined, that she was unlikely to prevail and was now subject to Ludovico’s whims. All she could do was to wait until such time that an opportunity arose to reverse the situation. She did not particularly care for her future but she was not going to relinquish her son’s patrimony to his uncle without an effort to restore it later.

Giorgio, with Gianni in tow, arrived as Ludovico was leaving Bona’s room. “Ludovico, is it completed?”

“Yes. She and Gian Galeazzo are under guard. She understands her position.”

Ludovico, now with an ever so slight smile on his face and a relaxed posture, threw his arms around Giorgio and Gianni and strode down the hall, down the circular flight of stairs leading to the huge castle entrance and into the courtyard. Word had already circulated about the coup, and Ludovico’s accomplices were circulating into the crowds praising Ludovico’s character, foresight and empathy for the people of Milan.

As Ludovico, Giorgio, and Gianni walked in the courtyard, Ludovico took Giorgio aside. “Where is Cicco being held?”

“He is being guarded in his home.”

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“Cicco is the power center here. He can bring us more harm in the near future than can Bona. We must dispose of him. We cannot have him representing an alternative to us. Can you do it quietly? Also, have all of the palace guards been subdued?”

“Of course, it will be done immediately and discreetly. The guards have accepted the transfer of power. There are no signs of a counterattack.”

As Ludovico sat on a bench between two tall cypress tree, he said to Giorgio, “I also need to call the privy council together. We know that several of them stand with us. The others will come along. My Regency is a fait accompli. They would not be so foolhardy as to oppose us at the moment. Also, begin looking for somewhere to relocate Bona and Gian Galeazzo. Give them several months here and then move them. Perhaps, the palace in Pavia will satisfy her and Gian. It has all the comforts of Castello Sforzesco as well as the benefits of country air.”

The summer sun was now beginning to fill the earth with its warmth. Trees and flowers were awash in morning light, enjoying the sun’s rays before the scorching heat regained its domination over them. Ludovico looked at the sky, a growing sense of contentment filling his spirit. He had plans for his Duchy.

Sixtus walked in his study reviewing the progress of the remodeling of the Sistine Chapel. He was surrounded by his architect, Baccio Puntelli, and the construction manager, Giovannino de Dolci. This new chapel was to