



A NOVEL BASED ON THE LIFE OF  
**COSIMO DE' MEDICI**

# FIRST AMONG EQUALS

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THE  
MENTORIS  
PROJECT

# Chapter One

## LEGENDS AND LEGACIES

The Mugello valley had never been so beautiful. Catching his reflection in the freezing cold waters of the stream where he had stopped to wash his face, Charlemagne paused and then looked up to take in the landscape around him—this place in the Tuscan countryside seemed suspended in a state of enchanted beauty.

The blissful nature of the Mugello contradicted its very name, for that tangible angle of Eden had been named after its first conquerors, the fierce and aggressive tribe of the Magelli, who, after moving from their original area in the Liguria region, had landed in Tuscany after many peregrinations and battles.

But Charlemagne ignored this.

What did matter to him during those fleeting moments so far removed from his courtly life, his duties, and his power was to be free to ride his horse along the interminable woods and the banks of the Sieve River, to admire fully the riches of that fertile land.

Like many before him, Charlemagne had discovered that the wide Mugello valley was the ideal place to hunt. It was a reserve fit for princes, noblemen, and even emperors with a bored but impetuous disposition.

While being a guest of the noble Ubaldini family, who had command over the Mugello fief, Charlemagne prepared himself to hunt deer accompanied by a handful of loyal men chosen amongst the inhabitants of the area.

However, early on that fateful day, the Emperor Charlemagne had unexpectedly fallen ill; it was a sudden ailment that some judged to be pneumonia, while others thought it could be rheumatic fever or an infection.

Whatever the cause of illness, Charlemagne was dying in one of the most beautiful places he had ever set his eyes upon.

Only one man, a local *mugellano* of a charitable nature and versed in the medical arts, had understood that it was crucial to intervene without further ado. He saw Charlemagne not simply as a great man who had been made emperor by the grace of God, but also as a human being who was fighting fiercely for his life.

That man carried with him a set of small metal cups for practicing the medical art of bloodletting, an ancient technique used by doctors and surgeons for more than two thousand years to remove the “bad” blood from the patient’s body.

The metal cups, similar to small balls, were applied on the emperor’s body; he quickly recovered from his illness, almost as if touched by divine intervention.

Full of gratitude, Charlemagne conceded to that skilled and generous man the highest possible honor—he gave him and his family a name and a coat of arms inspired by his medical knowledge that would resonate for centuries to come.



“That man of medicine was our ancestor. Even though we don’t know much about him, thanks to his charitable soul our family is proud to bear the name Medici. Even today, we bear the red cups on our emblem to remember him and the future he created for our whole family.”

“Is this true, Grandfather?”

“Every story, as fictitious as it may sound or even be, has something that we can take and make some good from. It’s your choice what you’re going to take from what I’ve just told you. It’s up to you to be wise.”

The time is a Florentine summer in the year 1460. The place is the Medici home on the Via Larga, a building so modern and perfectly structured that all Tuscan palaces of a certain importance built at the time used it as their model.

The aging Cosimo de’ Medici, banker, patron of the arts, intellectual, and de facto ruler of Florence, the first among equals, was spending his afternoon there in the company of his grandson Lorenzo.

The young boy was a child, yet in a few years he would gain the nickname of Magnificent and be known as one of the main personalities of the Italian Renaissance.

The story Cosimo narrated was probably just a legend. Each story is born of something, be it myth or reality, and the truth about the origins of the Medici family was—and still is—a mystery, lost in the fog of time.

The tale of the metal cups was considered by some a derogatory joke spread about by the French court, and it was, in any case, only one of many hypotheses and legends connected with the family’s name and shield.

“You see, Lorenzo, the origins of our family aren’t as ancient as those of Florence, but they’re equally, if not more, mysterious.”

Cosimo could have never guessed that the true origin of the Medici family name and shield would remain a point of contention among later historians, who, just like the scholars who preceded them over the centuries, would ponder over it with the most disparate theories.

According to the supporters of the “medical theory,” one piece of evidence was the choice of the two patron saints of the family, Cosmas and Damian, medics and thaumaturges who helped the poor and the needy. Other historians regarded the choice of the two patron saints as dictated exclusively by the similarity between their profession and the family’s surname, and by the assonance between the Cosimo and Cosmas names.

For some, the balls represented bitter oranges that the Medici traded with the Orient and a large part of Italy. Others saw in them the symbol of the weights merchants employed to measure goods and coins. And yet others believed they were an alternative representation of the shield of the corporation of which the family was part.

Some historians have attributed to the Medici shield a heroic origin. One of the earliest members of the family, Averardo de’ Medici, was an officer in Charlemagne’s army and had become a hero in the Mugello area after defeating a giant, also named Mugello, who was swaggering about the region. The distinctive figures on the Medici coat of arms would have been inspired by the blows left by the giant’s iron mace on the knight’s shield.

Young Lorenzo considered the account he had just heard. The story of the healer was not entirely convincing to him and he still had a few questions to ask.

“But, Grandfather Cosimo, why are the cups on our emblem

red?” The question, springing from the lively and curious mind of Lorenzo, triggered an almost imperceptible smile on Cosimo’s face.

“You see, my grandson, when you’re sick, you can take a white, red, or golden pill. A white pill is mostly made of sugar, and its effects often bland and innocuous. A golden pill may very well be effective, but can sometimes create great turmoil all over the body, and only the richest people from the elite can afford them. A red pill, on the other hand, is more common; most people can afford it and its effects cure the body without putting it in turmoil.”

“What does that mean, Grandfather?”

“That while other families might use a golden symbol on their emblems to represent their status above others, we Medici chose red because we feel closer to our fellow citizens. Do you understand now?”

The young boy nodded gently, lowering his eyes. “And this other story is true?”

Another imperceptible smile. “Remember my words about stories, Lorenzo.”

Lorenzo raised his eyes again. “Tell me another one, please, Grandfather.”

The boy’s imploring eyes were fixed on the aging patriarch. The two of them were having such a lovely day together.

Lorenzo’s long and narrow nose, already pointy in his pre-adolescent features, seemed to tremble with the anticipation and excitement of Cosimo’s answer. Impatiently, he kept throwing glances toward the door of the patriarch’s study left ajar. The muffled noises and voices coming from the servants as they did their chores and from the rest of his family going about their day seemed to disturb him.

Cosimo's pale, lanky hand lifted gently a finely decorated porcelain cup filled with one of those infusions of medicinal herbs to be drunk in the morning. They were all utterly disgusting but Cosimo, always methodical, had accepted those supposedly therapeutic mixtures and many other obligations from his many doctors (who certainly weren't descendants of his legendary ancestor) as part of his daily routine. As soon as he emptied the cup, Lorenzo was already refilling it with more infusion.

"Here, Grandfather. It will make you feel good," said the boy.

That small gesture meant so much for young Lorenzo. He was extremely fond of his grandfather and wanted him to be healthy and well forever.

Clean-shaven and with his hair covered by a cap made of light fabric, Cosimo appeared well groomed and, just like Lorenzo, dressed in a fashionable but not ostentatious manner.

Sitting on an old wooden chair—perhaps even older than he was—Cosimo was holding in his lap an ancient-looking volume in Latin. In that room, one of his many study rooms, Cosimo and Lorenzo were surrounded by all sorts of books—new and old, slender and bulky—and an array of other marvels that would have astonished old and modern and intellectuals alike.

Cosimo's physical aspect betrayed his advanced age—his face was a tapestry of lines and signs that pulsed gently with the steady, slow rhythm of his breath. His heart could not be tired out and his body bore the marks of arthritis and gout, an illness that afflicted his family like a curse. It had been one of the causes in the death of his beloved brother Lorenzo, twenty years before.

Cosimo tried to clear his throat—speaking too much and

for too long, even to his adored grandson, was not an effort to be taken on lightly.

Of course, he did not lack stories to tell. Throughout his life he had listened and learned, and it was thanks to this, in combination with his skills for business and a capacity to speak and act in the right way at the right time, that Cosimo had achieved his success and position.

His voice, once so bright and clear but also capable of being so thunderous that his enemies and peers were left trembling and subdued, was now nothing more than a whisper, a soft breath from a life that had seen and achieved all that was within man's reach.

Cosimo touched his lips lightly. They were parched and chafed, like those of a pilgrim stranded in the desert, he thought. That was an intriguing parallel, something so far and detached from his daily life that Cosimo would have found it bizarre and almost funny in another day and age.

It was not the right time to let his mind drift away, but Cosimo found himself momentarily lost in the memory of that short time in his life when he had been forced by his enemies to stay away from his own town. But, no. It was not the time then to dwell on that memory.

Cosimo drank the second cup of herbal tea, trying to forget its foul taste.

His body might have been showing signs of physical decline, but his mind was eager and lucid as ever, forced to observe the gradual failure of his body now marred by the ravages of time and of a life that had already been much longer than the standards of the period. The warmth and pungent taste of the tea hit Cosimo straight in his senses and he finally felt reinvigorated enough to answer Lorenzo's question.

“Do you have any special requests, my grandson?”

The child lowered his head, seemingly embarrassed to give such an unoriginal answer. They both knew very well which ones their favorite stories were.

The old patriarch was amused at his grandson’s reaction, and behind Cosimo’s expression there was a mind reflecting upon life and death, the past and the future.

As pragmatic as he had ever been, Cosimo was perfectly aware that he was living the last years of his life. The long conversations with Lorenzo and his grandson’s company, however, managed to make the weight of his inevitable fate somewhat more bearable. He would have been ready, though, to renounce all his riches just to have the chance to live longer and see his grandchildren—especially Lorenzo—grow into adulthood.

Cosimo loved all of his grandchildren, but there was something special about Lorenzo, something that seemed to bring their individual destinies together in an unprecedented manner.

It was perhaps because Cosimo found in Lorenzo the acceptance of his own mortality, a way to understand that the link between their lives indicated that his long life and all his achievements really had meaning after all and would never be dispelled. But it was more than that—Cosimo did see in Lorenzo and his brother Giuliano that period of his youth he had spent in the company of his own brother.

“Very well, Lorenzo, our next story will be . . .” The room’s door opened with an annoyingly creaking sound that interrupted Cosimo in mid-sentence.

Piero, the first son of Cosimo—Lorenzo’s father—appeared on the threshold. His sickly look and his face so prematurely wizened had gained him the nickname of *il Gottoso*, “the Gouty.” Gout did indeed afflict him, together with an array of other

fevers that forced him to spend long periods of time in bed or traveling around Tuscany in search of curative waters and other remedies.

On that particular day, as if by a miracle, Piero was standing straight and solid on the threshold of his father's study room. With a low and respectful tone of voice, he said, "Father, I have just returned and I wanted to . . ."

Cosimo stopped with a simple gesture, asking him to hold off long enough to give him time to take leave from his grandson. Piero had just returned from one of his therapeutic journeys and wanted to greet his father. Lorenzo was looking at Cosimo with a disappointed face.

"What now, Grandfather?"

"Now I reckon I owe you a story, son. Go to your father. He's worthy of your attention more than I am."

Lorenzo ran to his father, who greeted him with a soft caress on his head and a proud father's face.

"Don't tire your grandfather too much. Go join your brother Giuliano, Lorenzo. Your tutor, Gentile, is ready to begin today's lesson."

Lorenzo seemed to hesitate for an instant but Cosimo reassured him.

"Go learn, my child, cultivate your mind. I will still be here when you finish."

Lorenzo ran off, ready for his lesson. Piero's words referred to Gentile de' Becchi, a native of Urbino whose fame as a scholar and an intellectual had attracted Cosimo's attention. He had become the tutor of Piero's sons, teaching them Latin and Italian poetry and prose. Gentile would always remain loyal to the Medici family and later took various roles during Lorenzo's government.

Giuliano, who later died during the Pazzi Conspiracy against the Medici family in 1478, was not Lorenzo's only sibling. Apart from Piero's illegitimate son Giovanni, Lorenzo and Giuliano had three sisters: Bianca, Maria, and Lucrezia, who was known as Nannina, like Cosimo's own mother. Just like their brothers, the three girls had been educated following the precepts and the highest standards of humanist culture.

What was humanism? As a way to soothe the cultural decline of the Middle Ages and generate an artistic and intellectual rebirth, Italian men of letters started a movement that sought a return to the ideals of classical antiquity. This movement became one of the greatest achievements of the Renaissance. After the Middle Ages, which were characterized by an ascetic vision of humanity, humanism placed man at the center of everything and regarded him as capable of dominating all life and shaping his own destiny thanks to his intelligence and free will.

This new philosophy did not refute the principles and original purity of the Christian belief, which according to intellectuals had been lost in the previous centuries. Rather, it allowed humanity to experience a sentiment of guilt-free hedonism and naturalism—feelings that permitted man to search for pleasure and enjoy nature in and of itself. Humanists were well versed in rhetoric, moral philosophy, poetry, grammar, and ancient history; even the name derived from Greco-Roman roots, based on the concept of famed Roman orator and intellectual Cicero of *humanitas*, an ideal series of positive tracts every human being should possess to fulfill his public service and live a decent private life. Cicero's definition of *humanitas*—similarly formulated by Romans such as Terence and Pliny the Younger—went along with the classic Greek views of *philanthropia*, “the love for

mankind,” and *paideia*, the physical and mental education of the youth.

Cosimo looked Piero in the eyes. His son seemed to feel better than usual, even though his complexion suggested that he was prey of one of his usual fevers.

“I’m still not easily tired, my son,” said Cosimo.

“You’re still the sharpest mind in all of Tuscany, Father.”

“How are your precious daughters?” asked Cosimo. “I hope they’re having their lessons right now too.”

“They are well and they miss their grandparents, Father. And, to answer your question, I believe they’re busy with Latin,” answered Piero.

“Very good. I’d love to have a chat with their tutor to see how they’re doing. What about you, then? Would I be mistaken to say you’re just back from the Petriolo curative baths?”

“No, Father, I’d have risked running my fever too high.”

“Where’s your brother Giovanni? I haven’t seen him all day.”

Piero hesitated, seemingly looking for a convincing reply. “He’s . . . he’s indisposed today.” Cosimo understood perfectly well the reason behind that hesitation and he already knew the truthful answer to his question.

“Did he drink too much this time, or has he returned too late?” Cosimo reached his own conclusions even before Piero could reply. “I see. Too many celebrations and too much wine.”

“Only the latter, I’m afraid.”

Even though Cosimo loved his sons, neither Piero nor Giovanni had ever managed to meet the hopes and expectations he had for them.

Cosimo had always hoped that his sons would continue his political and financial activities and, as was the custom for all

aristocratic families at the time, Piero and Giovanni had also been educated by the best tutors available.

The two had very different personalities: Piero was introverted and held back by his numerous ailments, while Giovanni was bright but uneven, both in his studies and in keeping up with his duties.

Where Piero was austere and serious, Giovanni was light-hearted and prone to over-enjoy life's pleasures. He loved parties and staying out all night (and for a period, he had even managed to drag Piero with him). Giovanni was also a more complex personality, yet with a profound soul.

Memories of his sons' complicated study records appeared in Cosimo's mind. He remembered how he had questioned their tutor, the great humanist Poggio Bracciolini, about his sons' progress.

"Does Piero apply himself?" At Cosimo's inquiry about Piero's philosophy lessons, Bracciolini had looked resigned and beaten.

"Piero has ambitions too high to be reached but only manages to grasp concepts that are closer to him."

"What about Giovanni?" asked Cosimo, who'd known Bracciolini for a long time and considered him a personal friend he could always trust.

"Giovanni? Well, his mind is certainly bright but he's in dire need to concentrate on his grammar exercises if he wants to retain anything he's learned so far!"

Despite their personal limitations, flaws, and vices, Cosimo's sons grew to love and protect art and culture, thus becoming sponsors of many artists.

Cosimo introduced them, from a very young age, to the

world of business and put them at work as apprentices in his banks. Although he had clearly understood that neither of his sons had inherited his financial acumen, he never gave up on involving them directly in the family's affairs.

Their business sense proved to be inconsequential, but they did gain some success in their political activities. Both sons traveled as ambassadors and took political offices in Florence.

Just like Piero and Cosimo, even Giovanni had resigned himself—mainly for the love for his family—to follow the directions of a wide group of doctors.

“Is Giovanni following the doctors' orders, Piero?”

Piero started to list the latest orders the doctors had imposed on Giovanni. “To live in a salubrious place. To eat well. To avoid drinking too much. To avoid sleeping in the afternoon. To avoid excesses of all kinds . . .”

“And to take pills, syrups, all kinds of medicinal poultices. Every day, more than once a day,” Cosimo went on.

Father and son looked at each other with complicity.

“I now see Giovanni's binge last night in a better light. I would have allowed myself to be driven by my vices after hearing just half of that list,” said Cosimo.

“Not even an army of doctors could force Giovanni to follow their rules. Even if they're for his own good.”

Cosimo repeated those words with a trace of bitterness in his voice. “For his own good, yes.”

Piero took a little book out of his pocket. Cosimo regarded it with curiosity.

“What is that?” he asked.

“A new collection of poems,” said Piero. “It's for you.” Cosimo took the volume in his hands and regarded it attentively.

“Thank you, Piero. A new addition to my libraries.”

“It’s from Lucrezia, Father. She obtained it for you in Siena.”

“Lucrezia is the finest mind in the family. And often its only real man,” Cosimo said with a voice full of the admiration he felt for his daughter-in-law.

Piero nodded approvingly. His wife took care of the family and of Piero’s own well-being, even of his business, when Piero was too unwell to do that himself. For this reason, he did not feel undermined or offended by his father’s words.

According to the custom of great families of the time, Cosimo had made every effort to find wives for his two sons, hoping to instill new life into Piero and calm down Giovanni’s fiery spirits this way.

For Piero, Cosimo chose Lucrezia Tornabuoni, daughter of the merchant Francesco Tornabuoni, an ally and supporter of Cosimo even during his most difficult moments.

Lucrezia was the right choice for Piero, not just because they shared a mutual love for culture and patronage, but also from the point of view of alliances, because the Tornabuoni were supporters of the Medici and also one of the most prominent Florentine families.

Cosimo’s esteem for her was certainly not unfounded.

Lucrezia was an extremely cultivated woman; friends with contemporary intellectuals, a poetess, and a woman of letters; a benefactor of the poor, a backer of craftsmen and entrepreneurs. She was also a shrewd businesswoman, and continued to be one of the family’s keystones even after Cosimo’s death, as Piero eventually became bedridden with gout.

“What is good for Florence and Tuscany is also good for the Medici family,” Lucrezia would say when someone asked about her businesses and charitable work.

Finding a wife for Giovanni was more difficult for Cosimo, as Giovanni was not inclined toward being “trapped” in a marriage.

Now Cosimo’s mind returned to the memory of a letter that a friend addressed to Giovanni. “Do not move from where you are and don’t come back to Florence, otherwise your father will force you to take a wife! You’ll end up stinking of rotten sulfur like your brother!”

In spite of the complaints, Giovanni married Ginevra Alessandri, who came from a family originally part of the Albizzi, among the most ferocious rivals to the Medici.

If the wedding of Piero with Lucrezia was mainly aimed toward reinforcing the *Banco* and financial interests, the one between Giovanni and Ginevra was aimed toward a political and domestic reconciliation between Cosimo and the descendants of his determined adversaries.

Cosimo also had a third son, Carlo, born out of a relationship with a Circassian slave named Maddalena, who had been bought in Venice and kept at home as a servant, the custom of rich Italians at that time.

The importation of slaves into Florence was a consequence of frequent plague epidemics, which had decimated part of the city’s manpower during the fourteenth century. The most requested slaves were young women to keep at home as servants, often becoming concubines of the master of the house. As per the custom during that period, the birth of an illegitimate child would not bring dishonor to a family, nor did it perturb its balances. The child would be raised with his or her legitimate siblings.

Carlo was healthier and more sensible than his brothers, and had followed the ecclesiastical path, earning esteem and praise

from both his father and the religious authorities, especially for his appointment to the Prato Cathedral.

Besides, having Medici blood in his veins, Carlo also knew exactly what to do when it came to financial matters. And, to that acumen, in spite of his religious vocation and quiet personality, he connected memories that could still put a smile on Cosimo's face.

"The water that runs in the fountain here in your villa is so pure and clear, Father," Carlo said once when visiting Cosimo in one of his country houses. "So pure that it could go through my hands as if they were transparent."

Before Cosimo could answer, Lorenzo, who was even younger then, put himself between his grandfather and uncle and, without thinking twice, exclaimed, "But if that water were made of money—you would never let it go through your hands, Uncle!"

Struck by family ailments but not inclined to abandon his lifestyle, Giovanni would die in 1463, an event that put Cosimo in a state of dejection. Cosimo himself followed his second-born son to the grave shortly after. With the death of Giovanni and Cosimo, Piero was then left with Florence's destiny in his hands. He was forced to manage difficult situations up until his death, and the handover to Lorenzo.

But in this moment, in the year 1460, seventy-five-year-old Cosimo was pensive about the future of his family.

"We must be patient with your brother, Piero. Not unlike you, he has . . ."

Before Cosimo could finish, the sound of laughter and quick steps in the hallway made the two men turn their heads.

Lorenzo was running with a pitcher full of water in his hand, laughing as he tried to carry it without spilling a single drop.

“Father! Grandfather! Look how strong I am!”

Piero addressed him severely. “Lorenzo, what did I tell you?”

“But *maestro* Gentile wanted some water!”

“If I see that you spilled even one drop on your grandfather’s floor, I’ll . . .” threatened Piero.

Lorenzo ran away before his father had time to finish. Cosimo and Piero looked at each other.

“At least his siblings are less of a handful,” sighed Piero.

Cosimo continued. “You’re two intelligent men. Despite his lows, your brother has already done much with his life—as you have—despite all your maladies.”

“I know, Father. I know Giovanni’s vices haven’t completely enslaved him. That was a risk when he was younger, but now I see the man he has become,” replied Piero. “It’s just that ever since his son Cosimino succumbed to his illness last year, I fear Giovanni is pretending to be happy despite feeling hollow inside.”

Cosimo closed his fists; a deep sadness came upon him. His son Giovanni had tried to have children twice more, but they died shortly after birth.

“Seeing the happiness of your children must be punishment for him . . . Cosimino, named after me, didn’t even live to be ten years old. And here I am, an old man, something from the past, a relic.”

Piero tried to console his father, but struggled to find the right words.

“Father, you . . .” Noticing his father’s lost gaze, Piero stopped. “Is something troubling you?”

“Do you ever think of the future, Piero?”

“If this is about our family future, I understand your concerns, but . . .” Cosimo stopped him. One thing he didn’t want was to be pitied or misunderstood.

“No. That’s not what I’m talking about,” said the old man. “The family will resist as it always has. And Florence will stand with it.”

Piero wasn’t understanding. “Then, what is it?”

Cosimo became even more cryptic. “Do you ever think of the future *and* the past?”

Cosimo moved toward a pile of books on a shelf—ancient volumes, dusty and precious, full of history and wisdom. It was just a tiny fraction of the legacy Cosimo would leave to the world, yet so inestimable. Cosimo started to caress the books’ spines, lost in his thoughts. Piero understood that it might be best to leave him on his own.

“I will see you later, Father.”

Sitting on a chair and surrounded by a dozen books taken down from the shelves, Cosimo continued to reflect. His mind was still full of doubts.

“*How has my life been? Where did all the years go?*” Cosimo asked himself.

Shortly after, a feminine hand gently opened the door. It was Contessina de’ Bardi, wife of Cosimo for more than thirty years.

Contessina hadn’t been named as such because of a title of nobility. She was given the name in honor of the famous countess Matilda of Canossa, a historical figure in Florence’s destiny toward the end of the year 1000, through her role as a faithful ally of the pope in the struggle against Emperor Henry IV, and a proponent of the autonomy of Florentines.

Contessina was the same age as Cosimo, and they were each

from a prominent Florence family—their marriage was politically important. The Bardi, once among the first European bankers, had lost most of their riches and importance following a missed reimbursement of money lent to the King of England, Edward III, but they had subsequently managed to get back their wealth thanks to cautious investments and land ownership.

Pragmatic and calm, Contessina did not have the brilliance nor the intellectual passions of a woman like Lucrezia, and spent her days dealing with house chores and family matters and taking care of relationships with the merchants who supplied the family properties with food and other goods. She found happiness in caring for the domestic environment and her love for her husband, children, and the rest of the family.

The relationship with her husband had never dimmed, even with Cosimo's exile while Contessina lived out of the city, always managing part of the family's affairs, nor with the birth of the illegitimate son.

"Since you left, I haven't received any more news of you, and this week seemed like a year," wrote Contessina to her husband. "Take care in eating well or that health problem of yours will start again," she wrote to one of her sons. Those letters—out of which around thirty survived—written to Cosimo or to her sons when they were far away, were full of love and concern, and demonstrated Contessina's calm and reflexive nature, as well as her practical sense. She was a woman who never lost heart in the face of a challenge but instead immediately looked for a solution.

"Piero is worried about you," said Contessina now to her husband.

"Piero is always worried about me. And so is Giovanni," replied Cosimo.

"He told me something's troubling you. Perhaps . . ."

“Perhaps what?”

“He, and maybe even Giovanni, think you’re not proud of them.”

“I’m proud and full of love when I see all of you. And despite what they might think, my love includes both Piero and Giovanni.”

Cosimo was inscrutable. Not even Contessina seemed to understand what was ailing him.

“You’re thoughtful, even more than usual. It’s true, then. Something is troubling you.”

*Something’s troubling you.* Cosimo kept hearing this phrase in his head. Then he answered his wife.

“I’ve spent all my life thinking. About business, about Florence, about *thinkers*, about my loved ones. But now I’m constantly thinking about myself, about the meaning of my life.”

Contessina tried to move the conversation in another direction, hoping to awaken his love and sense of pride for his grandchildren, and thus lift up his mood.

“I saw Lorenzo and the other little ones scurrying by . . .” she mentioned.

“Fate has been kind to us. Piero has been blessed with wonderful children and we have been blessed with wonderful grandchildren. Giuliano, Nannina, and Bianca will do much with their lives, but Lorenzo . . . Lorenzo is the one who will take this family forward into the future.”

“Lorenzo and Giuliano always remind me of you and your brother.”

Cosimo wasn’t expecting that reply, and for a moment he remained stunned, lost between happiness and pride.

“It’s the best sentiment anyone could have ever said to me.”

“I might say that love is blinding you, blinding *us*, but . . .”

“. . . You can't."

"Yes, Cosimo, I can't. We've been blessed."

"When I look Lorenzo in the eyes, I see . . ."

"The future."

Cosimo opened a closet, taking out a stack of papers bearing his writing. Only one look was enough for Contessina to understand what they were.

"Your . . . ?"

"You have to tell your story before you start forgetting it." Cosimo took the stack of papers and locked them in the drawer.

"Maybe Lorenzo will hear my story from me, in person, and not just from my memories."

"Your legacy will last forever, no matter what."

*Forever . . . forever . . .* The words echoed in Cosimo's mind. Thoughts were vanquished by memories, which would increasingly come to the surface to replace the present.