

A NOVEL BASED ON THE LIFE OF  
**PIETRO BELLUSCHI**

THE  
**JUDICIOUS USE**  
— OF —  
**INTANGIBLES**



**W.A.W. Parker**

"An informative introduction not only to Belluschi's important work,  
but also the state of modern architecture."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

**M**  
THE  
MENTORIS  
PROJECT

# Chapter One

SUNRISE. SUNSET.

If you stand in this spot long enough, you can see the sun rise and set over water in both directions without moving an inch. Too bad Pietro doesn't want to stand still. But then again, what five-year-old does?

Pietro races to the top of the hill, up where the ground disappears and all that's left is sky. If he stretches his arms far enough apart, they'll become wings.

Out on the horizon, the sky merges with the sea. Pietro squints. *What lies beyond it?*

Pietro wants to float high above this peninsula set out in the Adriatic and soar across the sea to distant shores.

Sunrise. Sunset. Light lapping. Water wrapping. Day after day, the sun rises and sets on the cliffs of Ancona. Every day the ocean smashes into rock but never tears it apart. Every day Pietro spreads his arms, wishing they were wings. Or if not wings, then fins, so he could leap off the cliffs, dive into the depths, and swim. Or perhaps both. He could fly like a fish and bob like a bird.

Pietro doubles over. *How silly.* He can't be both. He has to decide—what will it be today: fly or float, soar or swim? Pietro looks at his hands. What will they be: feathers or fins? But they're clammy to the touch. He can't decide.

So his imagination pulls him underwater.

He gulps, wishes his lungs were gills.

The salt from the ocean wafts into the air, where it reaches Pietro's nostrils. The air next to the ocean always smells sharper than it does in the rest of the town. Perhaps it's because of the salt. Salt always makes things taste more alive. Salt is good, unless it's in a wound. Pietro has heard people say that.

The air in his lungs gives him life. He flops around like a fish out of water.

He'll be a fish—for today, at least. He bends his arms out in front of him, using his fins to push the water past his lungs.

The lungs are among the most important body parts, and the elbows are often the most overlooked. Pietro lives in the Elbow, or Ancona, Italy, as it's called. The town got its name from *ankón*, Greek for *elbow*. The arm bends at the elbow. And in Ancona, the land bends out into the ocean, forming a peninsula. The sun rises over the Adriatic and sets over the gulf.

Pietro splashes around the Ancona Cathedral, a Romanesque church atop the peninsula, standing guard over the sea. Pietro crests the waves in his imagination, taking another big swallow before diving below. Then his brow furrows. His lips smack of salt. He tastes the ocean, smells it. And there's another aroma. What could it be?

His eyes become saucers. *Mussels!* But then he furrows his brow. *What time is it? Where is the sun?*

Pietro centers himself on the church, spots the sun shining over Christ's cathedral, and uses the dome as a dial, marking the angle, even though it's no St. Mark's.

Pietro's mouth drops. Then he gasps for air, even though he's not a fish. If he doesn't get home in time for dinner soon, he might become it. It's not only time for dinner; it's time to run.

Pietro bounds down Via del Comune, down the hilly slope. Each step is carefully and quickly laid out, like a mountain goat's. Will he make it home in time? One can only hope.

Luckily, he lives only a short distance away. Close to his play. Pietro hurtles through the doorway and finds his family sitting around the table in their packed apartment. But Grandma hasn't placed the platter on the table. There's still time. Pietro launches himself into the open seat. No, not the one left vacant for his grandfather. That one stays empty. His grandfather was one of the railroad's first fatalities. It's an odd distinction, but then again, Pietro's family *is* odd.

His father, Guido, keeps a journal of every malady he's ever had, even skinned knees and sore throats, ever since he had yellow fever and smallpox as a child. Pietro's mother, Camilla, gives off the maternal energy of a viper. She fell ill soon after Pietro's birth and arranged for a live-in maid to care for her until she got her strength back. But she still hasn't recovered. She can't carry anything except for resentment.

If she could lift something, it would be a club. Camilla

never seems excited to have children unless she's ordering them around the apartment. Or listening to Margherita sing. Pietro's sister Margherita is only four years older than him but is already training to be an opera singer. To Pietro's young ears, though, it's less "training" and more "straining." Margherita can squelch out a decent *O Mio Babbino Caro*, a song about a young woman yearning for marriage, but who would want to marry Margherita after listening to her sing is anyone's guess.

Margherita is only nine, but Camilla is already planning her wedding. More importantly, she's planning her reception—not Margherita's, but Camilla's. After the wedding, Camilla will make her grand entrance back into society by singing the Queen of the Night aria from *The Magic Flute* to her daughter in front of everyone, even though the song choice may not be appropriate for the occasion.

Next to Margherita are Pietro's auntie and uncle. It can be both easy and odd to describe Pietro's relationship to them. He rarely likes to get into it, but while we're making introductions, let's try. His uncle is his father's brother, but he's also his aunt's husband. Similarly, his auntie is his mother's sister, but she's also his uncle's wife. But neither of them are "in-laws." No, that's still too confusing. Basically, Pietro's father's brother married Pietro's mother's sister. Two brothers married two sisters. And they all live together in one packed apartment. One big, happy family all packed together clammily.

At the head of the table, across from Grandfather's empty chair, sits Grandmother, a matriarch with spark, clearly showing

who gave Camilla her bark. “Where’s dinner?” she calls to Camilla in the kitchen.

Camilla’s face sours as she adds lemon to the dish. She has her helper bring it to the table.

Grandmother leads them in saying grace before she takes a big scoop of pasta the size of her face. Together, Pietro’s family eats *in grotta*, mussels caught off the rocks that day mixed with pasta, a favorite not only in their apartment but in all of Ancona.

Dinner, then mass—it’s been the Belluschi family tradition every Saturday since Pietro can remember. Although he can’t remember all that far back, actually, but it still seems like a long time to him.

Pietro drags his feet as they walk up the hill. He crosses to the other side of the street, cross with his family for dragging him to yet another mass, but they don’t notice. There are so many of them, they take up almost the entire street anyway. It’s not that Pietro hates going to mass. No, sometimes it can be a fun game to try to figure out what the priests are saying. Pietro hasn’t started school. He hasn’t learned a lick of Latin, so it’s all Greek to him. Trying to decipher what’s actually going on is the only game he can play during church. You can’t spread your arms into wings, you can’t turn them into fins. You can only stand there and listen, even before the priest begins.

You can’t even sit; there are no pews. You can rent chairs, but the Belluschis don’t. They attend church so often that the cost would quickly add up, and they can’t afford the expense, even though Pietro’s father has a good job as a minor official

in the office of land assessment for the railroad. Pietro's grandfather worked for the railroad and so does his father. Working for the railroad is a Belluschi family tradition, just like eating *in grotta* and then marching to mass. Why should Pietro even think about going into any other profession? Why bother?

Pietro's grandmother, the most devout and stout of them all, says standing during the service builds character. Mussels are big in Ancona; they like them in their pasta and they like them in their legs. But she *would* say that. If Pietro knows anything about his grandmother, it's that she's his mother's mother. Sometimes Pietro thinks she enjoys watching him squirm, changing his weight from one foot to another, trying to hold firm. But Saturday mass is only a precursor to Sunday mass. And in both he's not allowed to squirm. And he's not allowed to sass.

Pietro loves cresting the hill to the cathedral to play on the peninsula, but sometimes he's too tired to do it. On this particular day, though, he learns something that gives him the energy to climb, maybe even all the way to the church's dome. Pietro's father is being transferred from Ancona to Rome.

It's 1905. And Pietro is now six. He's still a small fish, but he's already bristling at the size of his pond.

He was born in 1899, a century ago, and Ancona still feels stuck in the one before that.

Even though he'll only be traveling across land, Pietro leaps into the air. Anywhere is better, as long as it's out of Ancona. Anywhere as long as there's adventure.

He has so many questions about what he's about to

encounter, what he's about to do, but at the moment, Pietro's only concern is what happened on Saturday and Sunday, and all the Saturdays and Sundays before that. He's concerned about something much closer to home.

“Do the churches have seats in Rome?”



## Chapter Two

### THE TOMB

It looks like a plate trimmed with gold. Its edges are soft. The amber light refracts around a circle, creating a chasm into the clouds. Everything climaxes in that spot in the center, a dark circle surrounded by white, a pupil, almost as if God were looking back at you.

Pietro gazes into the frescoed cupola of *Sant'Agnese* in Rome. This church doesn't have pews either, but he's still mesmerized by the magnificent baroque design by Francesco Borromini.

The only place Pietro is allowed to sit is in school, but he fidgets as much there as he does in church. There's so much to learn outside the classroom, so why can't they have class outside? There's so much to see in Rome: St. Peter's. The Sistine Chapel. The Colosseum. The carriages. The washerwomen stringing up row after row of clothes in the street. Are there enough people for all these linens? There are so many people in Rome and everyone is walking somewhere. The city has an odd odor, one Pietro can't quite place yet. In Ancona, he could always tell how far he was from the sea by how much salt was in the air.

Sometimes he could do it by sensing the incense wafting in and out of the cathedral, but here in Rome, there are so many of them. So many cathedrals. So many steeples. So many people. Perhaps the odd thing about the aroma of Rome is that there's not just one scent, but many on top of each other, all simmering together in a pot.

Pietro savors roaming about Rome, smelling the perfume of pots of pasta prepared in the kitchens he passes. His father loves the scent of the city too. The two take long walks together where Guido talks about his love of language, literature, and linguine.

Guido misses the mussels, but he muses about the Muses, the museums, and all the mausoleums they get to visit in their new home.

"What's your favorite part of Rome?" Guido asks his son.

As Pietro considers the question, his eyes wander. He looks past the remains of the Temple of Saturn toward the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina. Everything in the Forum smells like sod, like old earth. But maybe that's just the men digging into the ground a stone's throw away.

"I like it . . . here," Pietro responds.

"Ah, the Forum," Guido says, "where Rome lifts up her skirt and shows you what's underneath. Unlike all the other buildings throughout the city, it's only here where we didn't cover up the past."

Pietro smiles. He enjoys strolling around the Forum, but what he meant was: he likes it here, with his father.

"Is this place one of your muses, Pietro?" Guido asks, but

doesn't wait for the answer. "You must find your muses. Or, perhaps, let them find you."

Guido enjoys telling Pietro all about his own muses, the books and songs and symphonies he's encountered in his life that have impacted him, the things he thinks about as he strolls or takes a bath or does anything worthwhile.

"I have my own muses, Pietro, and as much as I want to give mine to you, I know they'll mean more to you if they are your own, if they come from you and your experience."

Pietro rolls his eyes. His father is always saying things like this, especially when they go out for one of their long, meandering walks. Guido likes to turn them into long, meandering talks. Pietro loves his father, but sometimes, when he talks and talks, Pietro balks.

But there's nothing Pietro balks at more than helping his father and uncle build their new house. He loves spending time with his father, but he's too young to do anything useful, so it's a lot of standing around, more like church than construction.

Dust hovers in the air as Guido mixes the foundation.

"Every house must have a good foundation," Guido explains.

"Is there any part of the house that doesn't need to be?" Pietro wonders.

Guido scratches his head. "No, all of it needs to have at least some semblance of good."

Then, as if God wanted to drive the lesson home, a sinkhole

opens up underneath Guido's feet and sucks him down into the ground!

"Father! Father? Are you all right?" Pietro calls down to him.

"Grab my journal!"

"Should I fetch a doctor?"

"My journal! Bring me my journal!"

Pietro looks around. *Where is it?* His father usually keeps it nearby. "Are you sure it didn't fall down too?" he asks.

Guido furrows his brow, then reaches underneath and pulls it out. "It must have broken my fall!"

Guido fishes out the pencil he stowed between pages, eager to scribble down his injury. He stands up gingerly. *Oof.* That ankle hurts. Guido's face contorts from pain to pleasure. First the pain of stepping on a sprained ankle, then the pleasure of writing it down for posterity.

"Are you all right?" Pietro asks.

"No! I got sucked into the ground! I could have died!"

Guido pats himself down. Checks for scrapes. But everything else seems in order, except for the ankle. He sighs, slightly disappointed.

"I'm sure I'll have some bruises tomorrow. Might need you to check my back for that."

Then Guido raises his head, no longer focused on his figure, but what's framing it. A small beam of light cascades into the space from above, bouncing off the stone below, illuminating the environs. Guido reaches down. This is no ordinary stone; it's smooth. Or at least parts of it are. A patchwork of odd-sized

stones, almost like broken-up tiles, lines the floor. As his eyes adjust, Guido sees the space for what it is.

“Grab a ladder!”

Pietro lowers it into the sinkhole, holding the top, steadying it for his father’s ascent.

“Are you going to come down here or what?” Guido asks incredulously.

“What do you mean—”

“Just get down here already!”

Pietro descends. His eyes adjust slowly. At first all he can decipher is . . . rust? The brown of the stone glows.

“What is it, Papà?”

“It’s a catacomb.”

Pietro cocks his head to the side. This is not a word Pietro has heard in school or on the street.

“You know what a church is, don’t you?” Guido asks.

“So this is an underground church?”

“Well, not exactly. Not anymore. But can you imagine why someone might want to build a church underground?”

Pietro furrows his brow. He does it just like his father. What could it be? “Would they do it if they were hiding? But, Papà, why would anyone want to hide their church?”

“How many churches did you see in the Forum?” Guido asks.

“There was the Temple of Saturn and the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina and—”

“Yes, those are *temples*, Pietro. Temples to pagan gods. Did you see where the men were digging, though?”

“Yes, Papà.”

“There they’ve rediscovered the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua. It might be the oldest church in the Forum. There aren’t many churches in the Forum, although there is the San Sebastiano al Palatino and the Church of Saint Frances. There’s also the Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian and, of course, the Church of Saint Joseph of the Carpenters, as well as a few churches on the outskirts of the—” Guido stops himself. “But the point is, there are a lot of temples there too, and it hasn’t always been easy being a Christian, you know.”

Pietro nods as if he does, but he searches his memory. Does he?

Guido catches his confusion. “You know we were persecuted, don’t you?”

Pietro shakes his head. He’s six. He hasn’t quite conquered the history of interreligious warfare yet.

“Well, look around,” Guido continues. “Look around at what we can do.”

Pietro complies, spies a small space. It’s much smaller than a church. In Ancona, and here in Rome too, hundreds of people sit in attendance during the service. But here, it looks like only a dozen congregants could congregate at any one time. The walls are rough, clearly carved by hand but never smoothed to the touch.

“We built places like this to escape persecution.”

“What’s persecution, Papà?”

“Some people didn’t like us, so we built places like this so we could worship in peace.”

Pietro spots a skeleton, swallows. “Were they murdered, Papà?”

“No, this is also a cemetery for our dead. I mean, some of them might have been murdered, but it might be a little hard to determine which of them died via natural causes and which were murdered and *then* dragged down here. The point is, they’re dead. And how they died is irrelevant at the moment, because we need to figure out what we’re going to do with them.”

“Are we going to bury them?”

“Well, they’re already buried. The problem is, they’re right under our house and . . . I guess we could bury them even more, if you know what I mean.”

Pietro nods, even though he doesn’t.

“But first,” Guido continues, “I think we should pray together.”

Guido bends his knees, sucks in air. “Ooh, this is going to—” he starts to say, but he realizes his sprained ankle isn’t smarting as much as it was before. “Oh, well, maybe it’ll balloon up overnight.”

Pietro joins his father on his knees and clasps his hands together.

“Please, Father, forgive us for our sins. Forgive us for what we must do. Forgive us . . .”

And that’s when Pietro stops paying attention to his father’s prayer. It’s not that his father is prattling on; it’s that Pietro perceives the power of prayer washing over him. He senses the prayers of his ancestors ricocheting around the catacomb, lashing around, yearning to be unleashed. Their earnest desires

surge through him. The ecstasy of their worship beams out of his brain, up through the hole in the ground, directly to God himself.

“Amen,” his father ends.

“Amen,” Pietro repeats. He blinks and looks around. He’s back in the catacomb. “But . . . what must we do, Papà?”

“Sometimes you can’t hold on to the past,” Guido explains. “Sometimes, like with our house, you have to build something new for the future. *Our* future.”

Pietro nods. He understands. You can’t always hold on to the past. There’s a time and place to remember it, like at the Forum. But if Rome treated its past like it did the Forum, there would be no Rome, only Forum. There’d be no place for new buildings. No place to build the Belluschi home.

Guido stands up. Pietro follows, grabbing a hand to stand. But it’s not his father’s hand. Guido is already over by the ladder. Whose hand is he grabbing? Slowly, Pietro turns to his side, finding the bones of a dismembered hand in his.

Pietro screams as the bones dissolve to powder. The skeleton sifts through his fingers like sand in an hourglass.

He bolts to his feet, flails, and rubs the remains on his shirt. Then he realizes what he’s done and rips it off.

No, you can’t hold on to the past. But then again, why would you?



## Chapter Three

### MOZART & SALIERI

An old man's lament. The pain reverberates in his throat. And why wouldn't it? Death surrounds him. It's toying with him.

Pietro watches the old man sing his sorrow. The man is Antonio Salieri. Or at least that's who the actor is portraying. He has lines painted on his face instead of wrinkles, and his voice has more gusto than bravado. The actor doesn't possess the timbre of an older man, but he has the ferocious will of one, especially one who's been wronged.

Pietro's father has taken him to see his sister Margherita perform in Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Mozart and Salieri*. It's an adaption of Alexander Pushkin's 1830 drama of the same name, but more importantly, it's Margherita's debut.

Unfortunately, like Salieri, she's not content about her place in it either. Over the course of Pietro's childhood, Margherita droned on and on about her desire to be an opera singer, how she would execute the most difficult arias flawlessly, but in her debut she doesn't get to sing a single note. *Mozart and Salieri*

doesn't have singing roles for anyone outside the titular characters. Margherita plays the blind fiddler who enters during the middle of act one, plays a quick violin solo, then exits the stage for the rest of the show. In this relative two-hander, it's a breath of fresh air that turns out to be a discordant note. The director said he thought of Margherita for the role after he heard her singing in another audition.

Like the actor playing Salieri, Margherita has to pretend to be older than she is, wrinkles painted on her face. Her hair is pulled back so tight she looks like a man, the type of old, blind fiddler you'd find on any popular thoroughfare. In essence, she looks the part.

Pietro wishes he were an older man. He's thirteen. Such a strange age. Finally, a teenager. No longer a child, but not yet a man. No, he has a few more years before that occurs. His mother likes to remind him of that. If his family were Jewish, he'd be a man by now, at least technically. Pietro would consider converting, but he'd have to convince the entire family, and they wouldn't have that.

His mother made sure to send him to the opera wearing a jacket and tie. She was much too sickly to go herself. She's always too sickly to go anywhere.

Pietro wishes he looked more macho. Margherita looks more masculine in her fiddler's getup than he does in his jacket. But the two of them are only playing at being a man, whereas Antonio Salieri is showing them how to be one.

Pietro can't quite figure out what's going on in the opera. Pietro senses Salieri isn't spellbound being the second fiddle in

this two-hander. He's older than Mozart, who isn't sporting any pencil-wrinkles on his face and is decidedly less carefree, but Pietro can tell Salieri is jealous of Mozart.

Pietro only discerned the man was Salieri, though, after the older actor sang a word Pietro recognized. Everything else sounded garbled, but this word came out clear as a bell: *Mozart*. Then Pietro connected the dots when Mozart, a younger, preening gentleman, pranced onto the stage.

Pietro can't understand what's going on because the opera is Russian, although he's heard several Italian operas too, and even then the singers wrapped their mouths around the words so tightly that they strangled any understanding. Then again, maybe opera isn't entirely dependent on words. Perhaps it's more about emotion. If that's the case, Pietro understands what's going on well enough.

It helps that Pietro knows a bit about Mozart. He's heard a few things here and there. He knows that by the time Mozart was thirteen, he'd already written several symphonies and operas. Mozart spent his childhood parading around the courts of Europe, playing for kings and queens. Some say he was more like a dancing monkey. An overtrained monkey who danced his fingers upon the keys of a piano. That's how the younger actor is portraying him. Mozart prances across the stage as he sings, running rings around Salieri.

When Mozart leaves, Pietro can see the pain in Salieri's face. But he isn't sad Mozart left. Rather, Salieri reveals the emotions he was hiding from the younger man all along. There's a yearning. Perhaps a plan?

When the second scene starts, Salieri seems resolved. Mozart mentions his Requiem. That's a word Pietro knows. Mozart is no longer prancing. He must be telling Salieri a serious story.

Salieri pours Mozart a drink. Maybe to end his nerves? Mozart gulps it down, but Salieri doesn't. Usually, one drink cheers a man up and many drinks make him sad. Salieri seems sad, even though he hasn't drunk anything. Perhaps he had a few between scenes. Or maybe he put something in Mozart's drink?

Before, Salieri held up a small vial. Whatever liquid was in the vial, it didn't compare to the vile emotion Salieri seemed to have about it. He was determined, but now, after Mozart drinks the wine Salieri supplied him, Salieri looks like the ghost Mozart might soon be.

Did Salieri poison Mozart, jealous of the young man's fame? It seems to be the dramatic question at hand. Pietro's chest hitches. He can tell from the look on Salieri's face that he poisoned Mozart. But the maestro doesn't know it yet. Mozart is not in a panic. He's in a cage but is not yet cagey, his ignorance giving him this moment of bliss before he's taken down in the abyss. Mozart is being murdered, but he's not dead yet. He's in that medium state, the one embodied in his Requiem, the one that plays the death toll that now rings for him. Mozart extends his arms, conducting his own mass. His somber notes take over the musical reigns from Rimsky-Korsakov.

When Mozart finishes, his face goes slack. Is he dead? Alive? Either way, he's at peace. The audience erupts into applause even though, as Pietro will soon learn, the opera isn't over. But

Mozart's Requiem is finished, and his applause will not wait for another composer.

Then Salieri launches into his own requiem. He crescendos with all the pain in his soul. All his demons dance out of his mouth. It's a dying wish, but it's not fulfilled. When Salieri collapses, it's Mozart's music that reigns over his body. It's Mozart's music that lifts Salieri up, taking him into the heavens. Or so Pietro envisions when he closes his eyes.

When he opens them, he finds Mozart's arms outstretched, welcoming Salieri. But is Mozart an angel, a devil? Christ himself on the cross? Or is he just conducting? Either way, his arms are open. His chest is unprotected. He's vulnerable. You can do anything you want to him. Treat him any way you like.

That's what Rimsky-Korsakov and Pushkin have done. The story was mesmerizing, but Pietro can't help but wonder whether the lives of these two men might have been more complicated than this simple story allowed. Pietro smiles. It's a grown-up thought. Perhaps he's more of a man than his mother thinks he is.

As the curtain falls and Margherita takes her bow, Pietro furrows his brow. He has another grown-up thought: After he's a man, once he grows up and does something on par with Mozart or, heaven forbid, Salieri, will his family see him as more than a man? And once he's dead, will anyone else do the same? Rimsky-Korsakov and Pushkin did it with Salieri in the opera. From what he can gather, Pietro surmises they turned Salieri into more than a composer. They turned him into an idea.

Before now, Pietro had never heard of Salieri. But he had heard of Mozart. Pietro could walk up to anyone on the street

and they could tell him Mozart was a visionary genius. So, given what he's seen, given the idea of a man Rimsky-Korsakov presents, was Salieri only able to bask in Mozart's brilliance, having none of his own? Did he really have a part to play in Mozart's death?

Pietro has so many questions for Margherita after she removes her makeup, after she removes the pencil-wrinkles from her face. But she doesn't seem to be able to remove all the wrinkles. Or more precisely, this experience has given her some. And she doesn't want to answer any of Pietro's questions.

"I'm done trying to be an opera singer," she says sullenly.

Apparently, there were three deaths onstage that night: Mozart, Salieri, and Margherita's career. And she was true to her word. Margherita never took another singing lesson. Soon after her debut, which turned out to be her finale, Margherita met an engineer and engineered a proposal out of him.

Margherita appears manifestly feminine on her wedding day, a stark contrast to her fiddler's garb. No, no one could mistake Margherita for a man today. She's a vision in white, but Pietro can only think about the opera. He hasn't been able to think about much else lately. Pietro's been having trouble paying attention in school too, because his mind is always focused on what he's learning outside it. Because Margherita was no help with his queries after the performance, Pietro has used his breaks at school to retreat into the library and research the lives of Mozart and Salieri. Pietro has learned that Mozart, while brilliant, was bred for success, given every opportunity. Mozart had issues with

his father, but Salieri had to overcome not having one. Both of Salieri's parents died in his early teens. He didn't have anyone pushing him; he had to push himself. Mozart was born into success, but Salieri had to make himself into one. And there's no real historical evidence to suggest Salieri had any part in Mozart's death.

It confirms Pietro's gut reaction that maybe Rimsky-Korsakov was making Salieri into more of an idea than a man. On its face, the opera is a made-up story full of made-up facts. But it seemed real. And Salieri made a compelling choice in it. A complicated choice. Pietro has heard stories like this before in church. They're called parables. The story can be shallow, but the emotional and philosophical weight of the character's choice runs deep. Sometimes there is no correct choice, only the one made in the moment.

In the opera it was clear who he should root for, but based on reality, Pietro isn't so sure. Who should he root for: the lauded genius or the man who worked his way up from obscurity? Who should Pietro try to emulate? Whose example should he follow?

Pietro will need more than a moment to think about it.