

## Dear Giuliano

Written by  
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Alessandro's fingers itched to trace the words, to caress the parchment that had been pilfered from his family generations ago. Had his granduncle been able to read that letter, the history of his family would have been vastly different.

Maybe he wouldn't be here, staring aimlessly at his grandfather's name.

### DEAR GIULIANO.

The calligraphy was immaculate, but Alessandro's attention was, as always, drawn to the blotched period; the ink bled outwards, not revealing whether it had been smudged by the harried sleeve of a tunic or smeared by a tear.

If he squinted, he could see the slit in the parchment where a knife had gone through: a small mark of violence auguring the dried blood that crusted the back of the letter, testimony of the parchment's vain attempt to save its recipient.

The letter reeked of existence and anguish, a testament to their family's miserable suspension between injustice and ineptitude.

### DEAR GIULIANO.

Justice could only be served if the Church relinquished its hold on the letter, but the possibility of its contents revealing the impiety and sacrilege bred within the walls of the Duomo de Firenze held it back. The Church would never demolish the sanctity of the Holy Office by blatantly admitting its hand in the desecration of that Easter Sunday.

It had survived for aeons against rumours, blasphemies, and known truths because no one could ever provide evidence for its transgressions. If it was going to lose its political power, the Church would lose it on its own terms.

But the letter was proof enough to eradicate those terms. Their avid guarding of it revealed that much.

### DEAR GIULIANO.

'Giuliano received a letter mere moments before the carriage set off, but he had promptly pocketed it in his breast, promising himself to read it on the morrow so that he could continue a conversation with his brother...'

His father's voice, crackly with age and strangled by the burden of carrying the loss (and the vendetta) from generation to generation, echoed in his mind.

It was Alessandro's job to remember now.

### DEAR GIULIANO.

Realising that winning against the Pazzis and the rest of the conspirators was impossible, Lorenzo – the brother of Alessandro's grandfather – sought shelter in the sacristy. Wood splintered as pews were thrown or overturned. A cacophony of footsteps and screams and hysteria and chaos and carnage and death slammed against the door of the sacristy, but it held, emboldened by Lorenzo's obliviousness of his brother being slaughtered right outside.

Blood spilled down Lorenzo's neck and into his tunic. He had been wounded.

Giuliano had been stabbed nineteen times. His body lay a few steps away from the altar, another one of Abraham's beloved sons. God had not intervened this time. Instead, the Pope had spoken in his stead, bidding others to raise the dagger in His name.

Lorenzo learned of his brother's demise hours later. He had not embraced his brother as he breathed his last, as the warmth left his limbs and the blood from his veins painted the hallowed floor: red and bright and virile. No, Giuliano's last embrace was by the cold, marble floor, forever tainted with sin.

When Lorenzo found him, there were only bloody fingerprints where the letter had been.

How could the conspirators have known about it?

Why would they take it if it were not proof of their actions?

## **DEAR GIULIANO.**

The events of that day came to be known as The Pazzi Conspiracy.

Despite the common knowledge that the Pope's nephew and an archbishop had been among the conspirators, the Church still hid behind its silver tongue, denying that Pope Sixtus had ever sanctioned the murder of the Medici.

And he hadn't.

He had simply expressed his wish for the Medici to be removed from their position of power and then offered his support to those able to do it.

How could he have known that their plan would involve murder?

## **DEAR GIULIANO.**

The broken seal made Alessandro grit his teeth – audibly, on bad days. Giuliano had never opened it, so the Church had not only stolen it, but also read through a dead man's last communication before 'honouring Giuliano's memory' by putting it on display in the same sacristy that had saved Lorenzo's life.

Encased in a glass box, the letter's proximity taunted every Medici that stepped foot inside the room.

Unless opened with its own unique key – which was kept on the Pope's person at all times – the box would supposedly incinerate all of its contents with the sacred flame of the Holy Spirit.

Alessandro scoffed whenever anyone repeated that superstition; if the letter truly burned, it would burn with a regular flame.

Yet, the unknown always held a grander allure than it actually had. Wasn't that how Lorenzo De Medici had acquired his moniker? Nobody knew how he had managed to maintain the Italic League, nor comprehended his profound love for art, but the mysteries behind him – and his infallibility in the public eye – only served to cement his reputation as the Magnificent One.

## **DEAR GIULIANO.**

On the 26th of April, 1478, Lorenzo failed to save his brother. The letter reminded them of that failure.

It whispered in their ears: accusations and grief and responsibility slithering sliding stumbling in their brain. Remember Giuliano de Medici.

## **DEAR GIULIANO.**

The parchment was immaculately preserved, but Alessandro knew that the edges would crinkle under his fingers, stiff with secrets despite being rendered soft with age.

Maybe the letter was not proof of the Church's guilt.

Maybe it was a letter from a lover.

Maybe it was a final goodbye from someone who had known, but could not reveal his knowledge.

Maybe it was Lorenzo's last words to his brother.

Lorenzo had had enough political influence to force the Church to display the letter in the same place that had ensured the survival of the Medici line: a testament to the Medici's power and a daily reminder that despite hearing and absolving countless confessions, priests were not above committing deadly sins.

Irony was the language of politicians.

But in the scenarios that Alessandro was conjuring, the letter would not contain a shred of irony.

Grief would twist the sentences until they were simply scratches of ink, drowning in misery yet devoid of emotions. Angered to the point of numbness at the world that had taken Lorenzo's brother from him.

('Lorenzo would never allow such a letter to potentially fall in the enemy's hands,' his father would say.)

Alessandro shook his head. What was the point of dwelling on what the letter could be? The seal had been purposefully damaged; there was no way of knowing who had sent it unless the writer had signed his name inside.

The bells rang, their jubilant chorus calling the flock to gather for mass and wrenching Alessandro back to the present.

Losing himself in those fantasies was ridiculous. The letter was not a heart-warming declaration of love.

He knew what it was.

## **DEAR GIULIANO.**

On some days, Alessandro resisted the urge to simply reach in and grasp the letter, foolishly believing that he could save the paper before the flames of hell ravaged it.

On other days, he was convinced that the fire was a myth; fear was an incredibly powerful deterrent, and the Church wielded it like no other. (Regardless, he would never risk destroying the sole reminder left of his grandfather.)

Most of all, he wondered if the family would have moved on had the letter not existed. Maybe it was a curse rather than a blessing to believe that vengeance could be achieved.

## **DEAR GIULIANO.**

To remember is to wear a mantle of misery, but nobody wants to be forgotten. So people leave marks. On the world. On each other. On walls. On canvases. Anything to force the world to acknowledge their existence, no matter how short or insignificant it was.

The letter was an acknowledgement.

An acknowledgement of life and death: of the fact that mortal sin was not an obstacle in the road to Power. Never was, never will be. The Catholic Church was a testament to that.

The letter was an unyielding, flaming sword of justice yearning for the blood of the Pazzi conspirators.

For the blood of human nature. For what is it to be human, but to demand immediate gratification in the name of Goodness, yet be willing to forge it through the tears and anguish of others?

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A quincentenary later, the letter was opened.

It was a warning: unread, unheeded.

It was justice's scales tipped irrevocably towards guilt, yet decrypted only by injustice's hand.