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The Death of Lorenzino de' Medici: An Account Written in his own Hand by Captain Francesco Bibboni

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The Death of Lorenzino de' Medici

An Account Written in his own Hand
by Captain Francesco Bibboni

I was just back from Germany, where I'd been a soldier in the pay of the Emperor, when who should I meet but Bebo da Volterra in Vicenza. He was staying at Messer Antonio da Roma's, a gent from that town, since he'd made quite a few enemies; and this Messer Antonio was really rather pleased to see me, and asked me to stay with him.

Meanwhile, a certain Messer Francesco Manente, another gent from Vicenza, got himself mixed up in a real nasty spat with certain members of the Guarzi family, and the Luschi family, all of them from Vicenza; they'd been at daggers drawn for several years, with many killings, among both the families of those who'd started the quarrel and the followers of the two parties. So this Messer Francesco asked my friend Messer Antonio where I was living, and would he be prepared to lend him my services for a day. Since he was such a close friend of his, Messer Antonio could hardly refuse. So Bebo and I went with the aforesaid gent to a village called Celsano, where both parties had property, and they all kept men at home ready for action, so that not a day went by without them heading out into open country to settle their differences with cold steel. So there were always men getting killed or wounded.

So, one day, the men in our party made up their minds to attack the opposite party at home, where we killed two of them; and the rest, five of them, shut themselves up in a neighbouring room, and barricaded themselves in. We nabbed all their arquebuses and other weapons, and they had no choice but to abandon the villa and skip off to Vicenza. And it wasn't long before this nasty state of hostilities was replaced by a nice long period of peace and quiet.

Then Bebo took himself off to Padua with the rector of the university, a Milanese chap, and after a while that same rector went off to Milan, taking Bebo with him.

I stayed on in Vicenza with Messer Galeazzo della Seta, since, despite peace breaking out all over, he was still a bit leery; anyway, I was there about ten months, and then I had to go back to Messer Antonio da Roma's. He had seven brothers. They were all pretty chummy with me and suggested I face life's little ups and down with them – on condition that if there was ever any chance of war breaking out, and I fancied a piece of the action, they promised to provide me with twenty-five scudi, weapons, and a horse, and the return fare, so long as I was still in one piece, of course. And if I didn't fancy going, the same deal anyway.

Anyway, like I've said, Bebo was in Milan, and Messer Francesco Vinta of Volterra happened to be there as ambassador of the Duke of Florence¹. Francesco spotted Bebo there and asked him what he was up to in Milan. He replied that he was a horseman going around seeing a bit of the world.²

Then Messer Francesco told him that, seeing as how he'd been away from his own country for so long, he should try and get permission to return, as he could rely on His Excellency's good graces; and he started to play up this attractive prospect, but in such a vague and indirect way that he left old Bebo feeling quite confused. But then he got down to brass tacks, and told him how things were with Lorenzino de' Medici, the nasty little traitor everyone knew about. He, or somebody, ought to try and pay him back for it; and if he, Bebo, would offer to see the job through, Francesco would send him to have a little talk with the Duke. So Bebo said he was up for the job, and Francesco sent him off with a letter to Florence. When Bebo turned up at the Duke's, the latter assured him that he'd restore him to favour in return for him bumping off Lorenzino. On top of this, they say the Duke gave him letters and money for his security. So Bebo took it on, but he also said

he had a mate as was just the man to help him out, and who'd find the job just up his street.

So Bebo came back from Florence to Milan, and then on to Vicenza, where he came to see me and offered me the job.

I said I needed to think it over; in fact, at first I didn't really know which way to turn. But when I twigged that this was what the Duke wanted, I promised to go along, and we teamed up, swearing to each other we'd keep schtum, and not bring anyone else in on the business. So, having shaken on it, we went to Venice to carry out our little plan. And since I knew the whole city of Venice like the back of my hand, and had loads of mates there, it was no great hassle to discover where the aforementioned Lorenzino was hanging out; so we took some lodgings in the same neighbourhood, and morning, noon and night we'd have a little wander round, thinking how to put our plan into action.

But since Lorenzino never set foot out of doors of his palace, we were a bit flummoxed, and pretty stumped as to how we were going to get the job done. But, as the Almighty would have it, Messer Roberto Strozzi³ came over from France with Captain Cencio Guasconi, and one of his sidekicks called Spagnoletto, i.e. Little Dago, though in fact he came from Navarre, and was a close pal of mine; anyway, as luck would have it, one morning I bumped into Spagnoletto. We were dead chuffed to meet up again, and made a real fuss of each other; and as we were having a chinwag, he told me they were on their way from France to Rome. I told him I wanted to go and pay my humble respects to Messer Roberto, my main man, the boss; and Spagnoletto said this was fine, as Messer Roberto had known me very well in Rome. So the two of us went over to Lorenzino's house (where Roberto Strozzi and Captain Cencio Guasconi had taken rooms), and funnily

enough, Messer Roberto was just going out with Lorenzino. But as there was a whole gang of gents and various other people with them, I couldn't get close to them. Messer Roberto and Lorenzino hopped into a gondola; and as it had been a long time since I'd last seen Lorenzino, and he didn't dress as dapper as he used to, I didn't really recognise him; one minute I thought it was him, and the next I thought maybe it wasn't. I was getting into a state and finally I said to Spagnoletto, 'I think I know that gent over there, but I can't quite remember where I've met him before. Messer Roberto was practically arm in arm with him.'

Spagnoletto told me, 'You know him all right, it's Messer Lorenzino, but don't tell a soul. He's going by the name of Messer Marco, since he's pretty nervous, and there's not many people as know he's taken rooms here in Venice.'

I replied that I was really surprised to see him, and if I could have helped him out a bit, I'd have given my eye teeth to do so. Then I asked him where they were off to just now; he told me they were going to have dinner with Monsignor Giovanni della Casa, the Papal Legate in Venice⁴. Anyway, I didn't leave his side till I'd wormed as much information out of him as I needed.

Spagnoletto had gone off with his bosses for a bit, and then he was given orders to return home; so the two of us went back to the palace where the said Lorenzino was staying, where I was to have dinner with him.

There was one of Lorenzino's stewards, who'd already been with Piero Strozzi in Rome. If Spagnoletto had greeted me like his long-lost brother, Piero gave me an absolutely fantastic welcome, and we palled up together again just like in old times. And before I left, as we were having a bit of a natter, I also found out that Piero Strozzi was paying Lorenzino an

allowance of 1,500 scudi per year, and he'd given him three bruisers, real hard men, for personal security; and he'd also given him a palace that he paid fifty scudi in rent for; but Lorenzino had taken a palace in the San Paolo district that cost him 300 scudi, so that Piero, because of Lorenzino's extravagance, took 1000 scudi off his allowance, with the result that he was left with only 500 scudi per year. It's perfectly true that when Lorenzino thought Strozzi was leaving him in the lurch, as he'd cut down his annual allowance, he kicked up a hell of a stink, and so Strozzi gave him Alessandro Soderini, another rebel, to keep him company. I was pleased as Punch to have got this information: it was pretty crucial for the job I had to do.

I also found out when he was going to return to the new palace; and through this servant of his, an old and close pal of mine – Luca his name was – I got to know everything he did, easy as pie: even how often he used to flob, in a manner of speaking. Then I found out that this same Lorenzino was head over heels in love with the beautiful Barozza⁵, and I discovered how he'd been sweet-talking his way into her affections. So I decided it was time to get the job done, as I'll tell you in a minute or two.

On the Shrove Thursday of Carnival, 3rd February 1548, Lorenzino joined in with the maskers and dressed himself up as a gypsy woman, with other people all tarted up in various costumes, all on horseback – they were breaking a lance or two on the square in front of Santo Spirito. We were thinking and thinking how to see the business through, but couldn't figure out how to do it; all the same, as far as I was concerned, I made good and sure that me and that trusty servant kept abreast of everything that his boss did and said every day. I listened to his information and took the necessary steps: that way I felt

sure as sure could be, and without his help we'd never have managed.

Now that I'd got this far, I chummed up with a shoemaker. One day I'd buy one thing from him, and another, another. Soon we were bosom pals, and the reason was that this same shoemaker's workshop looked out over the whole of the San Paolo square, and in particular Lorenzino's palace, where I'd cool my heels from dawn to dusk. This lasted quite a long period of time; I'd often make out I was having forty winks, though in fact I was keeping a pretty sharp eye on things.

Well, one day I was told that Lorenzino had gone to have dinner with Monsignor Giovanni della Casa; on hearing this news, we all went off, cheerfully resolved to get the job done; and I, bold as brass, climbed the steps into Monsignor Giovanni's palace, leaving Bebo downstairs in the loggia, and told him to be prepared for all eventualities. But we found that Monsignor Giovanni and Lorenzino had gone on to have dinner in Murano, so that we were left empty-handed. After that we made sure to take the trouble to get up-to-date information every day. And since Bebo didn't know Lorenzino, I pointed him out one day – this was when Lorenzino had come back to live in the San Paolo square, where, since they were new to the district, they can't have known their way around the local streets very well, as was proved when one morning, going through the streets to pay a visit to his little lady, the beautiful Barozza, they took the wrong turning; and on the way to a friars' convent, where she used to go to mass, they went down a different street, which took them quite a bit out of the way, and eventually led to a dead end. So we followed them, hoping to carry out our little errand, but we couldn't catch up with them, and so we turned right round and came back; and the men who hadn't been able

to get through that street also turned back. As a result, we met them in a spot where the weapons we had with us wouldn't have been right for the job in hand; so we realised we needed to get ourselves kitted with other weapons, more suitable for the occasion. We reckoned that we might bump into them some other time and get involved in a little fracas in the same spot – as did eventually happen.

On 13th March, the second Sunday in Lent, as I'd gone, as usual, to find out whether Lorenzino had made arrangements to go out, like on previous occasions, I popped into the shoemaker's workshop, the one I mentioned above, and hung around there for a while, until Lorenzino appeared at his window with a big towel round his neck, combing his hair. At the same moment I saw, going in and then coming out again, a half-pint little bloke called Giovan Battista Martelli, who acted as Lorenzino's minder, with his sword at his side. I thought to myself that Lorenzino himself must be planning to go out, so I went home to get ready and pick up the necessary weapons. I found Bebo there, still fast asleep in bed. I told him to shake a leg, and we made our way to the place where we usually kept a lookout, by San Paolo's church, right at the head of the square, where they'd be passing by. This church is situated like it was on an island, and it's got two doors opposite each other; so I stationed Bebo at the door in front of the church, and told him to stand guard there, and keep an eye open on the workshop. The minute he spotted I'd left it, he was to get going, and I'd follow him.

Now, as our luck would have it, the very same Giovan Battista Martelli came out, and walked a short way ahead; then out came Lorenzino, and then Alessandro Soderini, and they followed each other in a straight line, like a flock of cranes; and when Lorenzino came behind the church of San Paolo, he

lifted the reed matting which hung at the church entrance, so that Bebo, who was standing at the other entrance, saw him; and he also saw me, as I'd come out of the workshop, and we met in the middle of the street, as agreed, and he told me he was in the church; and as I stood watching the exit, I saw Lorenzino coming out of the church, and setting off down the main road, followed by Alessandro Soderini; and I followed them. When we reached the place we'd agreed on, I jumped out in front of Alessandro, dagger in hand, saying, 'Cheer up, Alessandro, you can go your way with the Almighty – it's not you we're after!' But he flung himself on me, and grabbed my arms and held me tight, shouting his head off. I saw I'd completely blown it in thinking I could let him get away in one piece, and I wriggled like hell to get out of his grip, but it so happened that I'd got my dagger free, so I lashed out, as God would have it, at his forehead, so that he started bleeding a bit.⁶ This narked him, and he gave me such a violent shove that I fell flat on my back: the ground was slippery, as there'd been a bit of a drizzle. Alessandro reached for his sword, which was in his hand with his sheath, and hit out at my mush, and he caught me on the breastplate of my cuirass, and it was a good thing for me that it was double-knitted chain mail.

Before I'd managed to get back on my feet, he lashed out at me again – three hits he scored, or three thrusts, to be more precise; and if I'd had just ordinary chain mail on my cuirass, he'd have run me through for certain, as I was still within close range; at the fourth thrust, I'd pulled myself together and I grabbed him from behind and lashed out at his head four times, and since I was holding him so tight, he couldn't reach me to hit me; but he tried to protect himself with his arm and his sword, thinking this would do the trick, but as God would have it I struck him at the wrist, near the sleeve of his mail suit,

and swiped his hand clean off, and then gashed his head open. This last wound was more than enough: he begged me to leave him in one piece for the love of God. As I was pretty anxious to find out how Bebo had been getting on, I left him in the arms of a Venetian gent, who held him tightly so that he wouldn't try and jump in the canal.

When I turned round, I saw that Lorenzino was on his knees and struggling to his feet. I was pretty miffed and slashed out at his head, and chopped it in two. He fell full length at my feet, and didn't get up again.

I couldn't see where Bebo had got to; but if I wanted to scarper, I'd have to make for the church of San Marcello, where there's a small square, and here I found Bebo, looking like a total dope. I gently pointed out that the idea was actually for him to have come and given me a bit of a hand. When he tried to find an excuse I said, 'Now's not the time.' And so, keeping up a pretty smart pace, we'd soon left the arena of our little exploit far behind.

At the Santo Spirito ferry-landing, we decided it might be a good idea to chuck our daggers in the sea, so we did. Carrying daggers was banned, and you could get sent to the galleys for using them; but it wasn't to be long before I rather wished I'd never chucked my one away but held on to it. What happened was this: Bebo and I split, having agreed on a place to meet, since I was covered in blood, so that if I had the bad luck to be captured by the fuzz, he'd have a chance to escape. And hardly had Bebo left me when, turning round, who did I see but some twenty coppers on my trail. I immediately guessed they knew everything, and were coming to nab me; and to tell the truth, right then, I felt the game was up. Then, as quick as I could, I stepped out a bit and slipped into a church, and outside the church there was this group of people, and they all went in.

So down I knelt, and ardently commended myself to God, asking him to save and protect me. But all the time I was saying my prayers, I kept my eyes open, and I saw the whole crew of coppers cruising past – except one, who came into the church. I kept my eyes skinned, and looked backwards as well as forwards; and just then I'd have given anything for my dagger – being in a church wouldn't have stopped me. But I realised that they didn't actually know a thing, and so I bucked up, and decided I'd walk slap bang through the middle of those coppers, my mind made up to go into the church of Santo Spirito, where the Reverend Father Andrea da Volterra was preaching, and then slip out through the other door. But I couldn't do it for love nor money, there were so many people around. So I was forced to turn back; and one of those coppers came after me and followed me a fair way until I got to a crossroads. Then I pretended I had lost my way and turned back, and that copper just kept on following me, and I thought I must have roused his suspicions because I was all covered in blood. Then I pulled myself together, turned round and, much to his surprise, gave him such a wallop that he fell headlong; then I legged it as fast as I could.

I was dead beat by the time I reached the Flour Customs; so I headed off to San Marco and jumped into a gondola which took me to the Paglia Bridge, where the Albanesi house is. Here I spotted a man with a sword, and as it was a place where the cops stand guard during the daytime, my heart sank. So I went and knocked on the door of a tart who was a friend of mine; she recognised me and opened up immediately; but as I was going up, a little bird told me I shouldn't hang about here. So I thought I'd better go, and headed off again, and without my heart skipping a beat or being stopped by anyone I reached the house of my Lord the Count Selici da Collalto di

Friuli, a very dear and close pal of ours, since Bebo and me had been pretty useful to him in the past. I knocked on the door, and Bebo opened up straight away; and when he saw me spattered all over with blood, he was just amazed that I hadn't come to a sticky end and been pinched by the long arm of the law, as he'd been afraid must have happened when I'd taken so long getting there.

The Count wasn't at home, but since I was known to everyone in the household, I threw my weight around a bit, and went to the big fire in the kitchen, and used a bit of soap and water to make my white stockings nice and grey. Meantime, the Count arrived, and Bebo went up to him and they gave each other the glad hand and he asked after me. Then Bebo told him I'd had a bit of a run-in with a copper, all over a woman, and that he thought that I was really and truly dead. And while they were chatting about all this, up I pop and present myself to him as large as life. He gave me a nice warm welcome and we had a natter about this and that; and as we talked, dinner time was announced; but since the leading medic in Venice was coming to have dinner with him, the Count didn't want him to see us there, and in fact he didn't want any of his servants to see us either. So he ordered dinner to be served for us in a room upstairs, and he and his secretary served us at table, and he chattered away and had a bite to eat. Meanwhile, the aforesaid medic arrived, and the Count went off to have dinner with him; and the secretary stayed with us.

While they were washing their hands before sitting down to their meal, along came an embassy from Lorenzino's mother asking that, if the medic was here, could he go straight away over to her house, as Lorenzino had been killed and Alessandro Soderini was on his last legs. When he heard this, the medic left immediately, and didn't hang around to eat his

dinner; but the Count came up to us and asked us in no uncertain terms whether it had been us that had done it. We denied it till we were blue in the face, but he'd got it into his head that it *was* us. But he gave us a pep talk, telling us not to get the wind up, since he really wanted to do everything he could to protect us; but he knew that the problem was that he had to attend the council that day, and he didn't know what time he'd be going out, and so off he went to have his dinner, and then to have a nap.

When it was time for vespers I decided, without saying goodbye to anyone, to clear off; and I told Bebo to follow me and keep tabs on me from a distance, and if he saw me getting nabbed, he was to save his own skin as best he could. So off we went, and Bebo didn't know where I intended to go.

We went to the house of that lady where we'd first taken rooms, and I had supper ordered, thinking that I'd hang out here for a while and see if the news of our doings had spread, so as to take the appropriate measures. But meanwhile, who should come along but two priests, with that lady's son; those priests knew me, and so we started to have a chat about this and that. A little while later one of the priests went out; well, that made me think, and so I told that lady that I just had to pop out on an errand, and I'd be back soon; and I winked at Bebo to come with me and we went to the Maddalena landing and got into a gondola, telling the gondolier, 'Make it snappy!' and asking him to head off to Santa Maria Sobenighi; and when I reckoned we were in the middle of the canal, I told the boatman, 'Drop us off,' and I slipped him a few coins, telling him to wait till we got back. And as soon as we were on shore, near the palace of the Spanish ambassador, I told Bebo that what I had in mind was for us to take shelter there.⁷

This plan was rather to Bebo's liking, and he agreed

without further ado, and so we went into the palace of the said ambassador without anyone stopping us.

Once we were inside the palace, we found about forty Spaniards in there, all ready and waiting, and they treated us really politely, as if they'd heard all about the events and guessed that it was us; I didn't get flustered, and took no notice of them or all their glad-handing, but told them I urgently needed to talk with His Excellency the ambassador. One of those gents replied that His Excellency was not at home, but that he'd be back before long; so we started to stroll up and down in the courtyard for a quarter of an hour or so; then I said, 'My lords, since His Excellency hasn't shown up, we'll go and see to a little piece of business and come back later.' I didn't say this because I really wanted to leave, of course, but so they wouldn't think we were the ones they thought we were. Then one of them told us straight that if we didn't feel easy in the courtyard, we could go into a fine private room next door and settle down there and make ourselves comfortable, and that made me realise that they were thinking that we were not too keen on being seen. I told him that we couldn't care less about anyone seeing us, as we were decent, honourable chaps, and could show our faces anywhere in the world. So he went on, 'That's not why I made the suggestion, gentlemen, since everyone knows you're thoroughly decent fellows; but you ought to know that what made me ask was that this morning Lorenzino de' Medici was killed, and Alessandro Soderini was mortally wounded. Anyway, the one who survived said that there were two attackers: one of about twenty-eight, and the other thirty-one; one with white stockings, and the other man a bit on the sturdy side and well built. That's why I spoke the way I did. Don't let it bug you.' Then I told him we weren't those two; but since His

Excellency wasn't at home, we'd like a word or two with his esteemed secretary, and then we'd be off on our business.

They took us to the secretary straight away, and maybe thirty Spaniards came up behind us, all in a real merry state of excitement. When we got to the secretary's room, I started to say that we'd come to speak to His Excellency but since he wasn't at home, we'd very much like him, the secretary, to listen to what we had to say to His Excellency, and then we'd be on our way; but before we started talking, we'd very much prefer it if there weren't any other people around. So the secretary immediately got up from his desk, sent them all packing, and locked and bolted the door; then he gave us a really big welcome and made a huge fuss of us, even before I'd started talking, and told us we could speak perfectly openly, and without getting in a sweat. And so I gave him the low-down; and the minute I'd come to the end of my little story, he was just all over us, and told us he thought we were the bee's knees, as we'd done what loads of others had tried to do but never carried off. And then he shut us up in his room, telling us he was going to find His Excellency, as he knew just where he was. And off he went, but he was soon back, and through a secret winding staircase he led us into the room of His Excellency, who gave us yet another really warm and friendly reception before asking us to tell him once more how exactly we'd done the job. He sang our praises for all he was worth, and promised to use all the power and might of the Empire to make sure we were properly looked after and delivered safe and sound into the hands of the Duke of Florence⁸.

'This very morning,' he continued, 'the minute I heard all about that fine and noble deed of yours, I sent off a messenger to the Emperor himself; and now I'm going to send off another one to tell him to guarantee you get well looked after and

protected by his forces. I'm telling you this because I know perfectly well he's going to be pleased as anything when he hears this news. So don't you worry about a thing; I hope to be getting orders very soon that will ensure you get a bit of proper protection.'

It wasn't ten days before we saw the result of His Excellency's efforts: a messenger came back with the answer that he was to do all in his power to protect us, and make sure he took prompt and swift action to get us back safe and sound into the hands of the Duke of Florence, as indeed happened.

Well, the prompt and swift action taken by His Excellency consisted in this: every morning he had it put about in the Rialto that the men who'd murdered Lorenzino had escaped to Padua on such and such a day; the next morning, he got people to say that on such and such a day they'd been spotted in Verona; other times, he'd have it announced that they'd been seen in Friuli, sometimes in one place, sometimes in another; and he did all this to dodge the numerous searches being carried out by the Florentines who'd been of Lorenzino's party, and the other rebels who were hanging out in Venice in great numbers and trying to get their hands on us. They'd posted guards at every entrance and exit, regardless of cost; what's more, they'd got four brigantines sailing up and down, keeping watch on all the passing gondolas; and His Excellency was well informed about all this, and kept his ears open for us.

Now, just you listen, and I'll tell you what great trouble His Excellency went to, to protect us.

He rented a really nice palace just outside where the Marghera passage is chained off, and every day he'd go there with fifty Spaniards; and when he was on shore, he'd take the carriages, and a group of them would head off on foot; it all

looked like an army, so those as had been posted to keep an eye on the Florentines all came over to see what was up, and every time they saw His Excellency, the minute he arrived, practising with his crossbow, and trotting round exercising a really nice horse; well, he ended up getting all those people so used to him that they no longer took any notice. Then, having calmed things down just as he wanted, he decided it was time to get us out of Venice, and he ordered the ambassador from Trent, Signor don Alberto of Spain, to come to Venice; then he handed the job over to him, and gave him a detailed description of us, giving him his orders on behalf of the Emperor and telling him how he was to deal with us and make sure we were safe and kept away from dangerous places, and where he was to arrange for post horses for us, and where we were to stop off, as you'll hear in a minute.

The day came when he thought it was the right time to get us out of Venice, and he sent up into our room his secretary, Signor Ximenes, to give us His Excellency's orders, which were to get ready to be off on our way; he gave us a long cassock down to our feet, and a short sword hanging from a belt, and a little cap and a big hat, so the two of us were dressed up like Brescians. Then he gave us a pair of scissors so we could cut off our beards, so that even someone who'd known us for donkey's years wouldn't ever have recognised us in these togs. Then we went down into His Excellency's room, and he made a huge big fuss of us all over again, and made us feel really welcome, and told us what schemes he'd been dreaming up on our behalf and what we needed to do if we were to get away in one piece. And after all this schmoozing he plopped down right in front of our eyes a big sack full of gold scudi, telling us to help ourselves to a good fifty, since we'd need them, as we had a really long journey ahead of us. As he

kept urging us, we took the money, and thanked him no end of times.

So we left the palace, and went to climb aboard a big gondola where there were twelve passengers all waiting, and a load of Spanish soldiers all tooled up – a good seventy of them. So off they went, and His Excellency set off too, and put us in his own gondola. So we headed off all bright and cheerful until we got to the Marghera port. When it was time to get out of the gondola, His Excellency jumped out first to see who was around; and who did he see but twenty-five Italian soldiers armed with arquebuses, standing around keeping an eye open for any Florentines who might be suspected of having carried out the job. While we stayed put in the gondola, waiting till the carriage was ready, they wanted to see who we were – so some of them wandered over and came up to our gondola to get a closer look. But His Excellency spotted what was going on and came back and asked those soldiers what the hell they thought they were up to and what they thought they were looking for, and he told them to clear off. So they did, pronto. Then His Excellency came to the gondola to tell us to get out, and he asked us if we were still feeling a bit feverish. Himself handed us into his carriage, and off we went to the palace he'd rented, with all his Spaniards leading the way; and as we were coming up to the palace, all the Spanish blokes went inside, and from the back door of the palace out came Captain Valeriano da Terni and his son with four post horses, two for us and two for them; and the ambassador gave us another hug and his very best wishes and said, 'You can go with these chaps to keep you company. They'll show you the road, and don't you worry about a thing.'

Then His Excellency went back into his palace, and we climbed onto the horses, and galloped off, from nine o'clock

till one in the morning, and kept the same horses till we got to a villa, where four fresh horses were waiting for us. We didn't have a bite to eat nor a drop to drink and didn't get a wink of sleep, just kept galloping on till it must have been six a.m. when we got to another villa, where we found a nice meal all ready, and new horses: and we reckoned then as we'd covered fifty miles. We stoked up, but still no shut-eye: back onto the horses it was, and this time we covered forty miles before stopping, so we'd got a good ninety miles all told away from Venice before we slept.

When we reached a fortified place where they spoke half German, we stopped in a hostelry, where mine host recognised us from the description His Excellency had sent him and realised we were in fact the people we were, and he gave us a real warm welcome and treated us better than if we'd been princes; and there we spent the night safe and sound, and the next morning at first peep we left with fresh half-post horses, so without needing to change them we galloped along till eight p.m., and reached some houses where there was a bailiff all ready and waiting for us, just as he'd been ordered to by a letter he'd already received. We had a snack and freshened up a bit and we were given new horses, and a guide, and for safety's sake he took us along out-of-the-way routes that nobody ever went down; and in three days he took us right through the territory of the King of the Romans, and then we headed for Trent.

When we reached there, we got off our horses outside a nice hostelry, and it wasn't long before two messengers came from Signor don Alberto, the local ambassador, telling us His Excellency was of a mind to have us stay with him. We were only too happy to do the right thing, so we followed instructions and didn't hang about but went and kowtowed to

His Excellency. We were thinking as how he wouldn't have heard about us or what had been happening (though in fact he knew every last little detail), so he kindly took us by the hand and told us he knew perfectly well who we were, and was fully up to date about the situation. Like he knew as how it had all happened in Venice, and it had been the idea of their protector the ambassador to have us brought here. We were gobsmacked. But he just kept making a fuss of us and praising us to the skies and insisting that we really must stay at his place, and he offered us cash up front and everything we needed. We said how very grateful we were and went back to our hostelry, where we had a bite to eat and then went off to sleep. And we slept like logs – we were bushwhacked.

Next morning, when we got up, we went over to pay our respects to His Excellency, and had a long chat with him about this and that, and he gave us a really nice breakfast. Then we let our guide and Captain Valeriano's son go, and they were only too pleased and went off, the guide back home and the other bloke to Venice. Then up trotted five post horses out of nowhere, as the ambassador wanted to come with us in person and keep us company till we got to the post station at Mantua. So as we wouldn't run into any danger, he sent five brave lads up ahead, to the town gate, where there were some German guards; he gave them express orders to make sure they stayed there, and if they started to get suspicious about us (which he didn't think would happen), or if they decided to get in our way, they were to lay into them until we'd got through. So we took to the open road. He made us change our horses the other side of the Adige, and as we'd got the wind up a bit we did a double stint. Anyway, we finally got to Mantua, safe and sound. We were about half a mile away when the ambassador split, telling us to stop at the Moor's Tavern, where we'd be

given a warm welcome. So we were – when we got there, mine host recognised us straight away, and I can't tell you what a fuss he made of us.

Then we went to pay our respects to My Lord the Cardinal of Mantua, who knew perfectly well who we were, and gave us cash, and some men to keep us company – in fact he wanted to give us fifty horsemen as far as Piacenza, just in case. But we humbly said thanks very much but no thank you, and went back to the tavern and got on our horses and reached Piacenza late that evening. Signor Don Diego di Mendoza was there, and we went to pay our respects, and to tell you the truth he was pretty chuffed to see us, and told us he'd let us have whatever we needed.

In the morning we left and went to a fortified place thirty miles away from Piacenza. The next day we got to Borgo Val di Taro, where there's a fortress held by the Emperor's men, and inside it there was one Captain Francesco Anguscioli, a gent from Piacenza. He went on and on trying to get us to stay in his fortress with him, but we refused, though we told him as how we were deeply grateful for the offer. But next morning he came over in person at first peep to see us, and took us to his fortress, and gave us a breakfast fit for a king rather than for blokes such as us. Anyway, that night at two o'clock there arrived at the tavern where we were staying a man of about thirty, on horseback, all kitted out with a chain-mail jacket and sleeves, and a dirty great wheel-lock harquebus and two smaller versions, short-barrelled pistols in fact. So mine host asked him where he was coming from and where he was going to, and he said he'd come that same day from Piacenza and was off to Pontremoli on a piece of business. We really got the wind up at this, especially as he left before the crack of dawn. We had a word in the ear of the captain in charge of that

fortress I mentioned, and he didn't hang about but sent off two soldiers on fine steeds with nice fine weapons, telling them in no uncertain terms to get their horses going at a cracking pace till they caught up with the bloke I mentioned just now and just make sure they brought him back, by force if necessary. And if he didn't want to come quietly, or if he put up a fight, they should do the necessary on him.

The two of them took off straight away and before long they'd caught up with him, as he was only trotting along. He came quiet as you please and they brought him to the captain, who locked him in the slammer. We later heard as how he sent him to Don Diego in Piacenza, and no one knows what became of him after that. But I'll tell you this for a certain fact: he'd been sent to do us a mischief. But thanks to our captain he blew it. Anyway, we left town, and that evening got to Pontremoli, where the man in charge of the castle there gave us a nice warm welcome. In the morning we got on our horses and rode off with the post and the postilion. The roads were lousy so we thought we'd not make Pisa by nightfall, especially as Captain Valeriano, who'd been travelling with us ever since Venice, was an old-timer who was dead beat by now, since we'd been riding for thirteen days at a stretch. We decided we'd leave him to it, and he could make it to Pisa at his own speed, as he did. We galloped off at top speed and got to Pisa at four a.m., and found the Duke there sitting down to a nice supper.

There was a general agreement that we shouldn't have a proper audience just then as it was so late. So we went to an inn and ordered some supper, and then we went to get some shut-eye, and next morning we went to have an audience with him.

As soon as we were in the presence of the Duke, he made a real fuss over us, and gave us the warmest welcome, and

praised us to the skies. He insisted on hearing again from my own lips (although he already knew all about it through the letters he'd received) how the job had been carried out. I was all too happy to obey, in fact that was only ever what I wanted, so I told him as best I could. Then he told us what good chaps we were and praised us no end, and said what brave lads we'd been, and how he himself was really most obliged to us, and wouldn't forget. Then he went on to tell us that we would be safe anywhere in his territory, and he issued a pardon for our wrongdoings, with detailed letters and privileges, telling us in no uncertain terms that we were to be given our just deserts not only by him personally but by his whole household too. He promised us all these privileges would be observed without fail, and they were, too.

The Duke went even further, in fact, and gave us a pension and a nice little income to keep body and soul together – quite a tidy sum, all told, and certainly enough for us to spend the rest of our lives in splendid style, with not a care in the world.

Bebo, a bit later, I misremember exactly when, went off to Volterra, where he was from, and ended his days there. And I stayed in Florence. No more war for me: I just wanted to live my life in blessed peace and quiet.

NOTES

1. i.e. Cosimo I.
2. The Italian phrase used by Bebo is rather more specific: '*cavaliere errante*', or 'knight-errant'.
3. The distinguished Strozzi family had mostly gone into exile from Florence and continued to plot against Cosimo. Piero Strozzi (1510–58), mentioned later as a protector of Lorenzino, was son of the celebrated Filippo (1489–1538). Piero had led the rebels to defeat at Montemurlo in 1537.
4. Giovanni della Casa (1503–56) was not only a papal functionary, but a man of letters whose *Galateo* (1558) became a widely known treatise on good manners.
5. Elena Barozza was a famous courtesan, painted by (among others) Titian and praised for her beauty by Aretino.
6. Bibboni's knife seems to have been poisoned. Alessandro Soderini died of his wounds. The exact location of the murder is not entirely clear from Bibboni's account, but probably took place near the San Tomè bridge.
7. The Spanish embassy would have been a safe haven for Bibboni, given the Spanish Emperor Charles V's support for Cosimo and hostility to Lorenzino.
8. i.e. Cosimo.