
THE PAZZI CONSPIRACY

by Angelo Poliziano

[*Translated with David Marsh*]



I shall proceed here to give a brief description of the Pazzi conspiracy, for this was one of the most memorable evils committed in my time, and very nearly overthrew the whole Florentine Republic. While the affairs of the city depended on the willing support that all good men gave to Lorenzo, Giuliano and the rest of the Medici house, only the Pazzi as a clan and some of the Salviati began, first secretly and soon quite openly, to form an opposition. They were very envious and wanted, if they could, to undermine both the Medici's civic power and their private position.

The Pazzi had made themselves unpopular with both the citizens and the humble folk for, besides being very avaricious, they were all unbearably stubborn and insolent; the head of the family, Jacopo Pazzi, a knight, spent night and day gambling, cursing gods and men when his luck was bad, and sometimes throwing the gambling table or whatever else came to hand at the nearest person. He was pale and weak, and had a habit of tossing his head all the time; the way he expressed himself with mouth and eyes and hands revealed his lack of stability. Two great vices were characteristic of him, vices that surprisingly seem incompatible with each other—consuming avarice, on the one hand, and, on the other, a mania for spending. He tore down the magnificent home of his father and started to build anew. He made much use of day laborers but did not pay them their full wages; thus the poorest sort of men who live by their manual labor were cheated by him, and he tried to make

them take their pay in rotten pork. He was always widely disliked, therefore, and his ancestors had enjoyed no greater popularity. But he lacked legitimate children, and was much courted by relatives who hoped to inherit from him. This man had no sense of responsibility, least of all towards his own family. The way he lived made bankruptcy foreseeable, which spurred him on to plan the crime and gave him the burning desire to carry it out. For this insolent, ambitious man was not prepared to bear public disgrace as a spendthrift. He planned instead to burn himself and his whole country in one great fire.

Francesco Salviati, on the other hand, was a man who had just come into good fortune by being raised to the position of archbishop of Pisa. He had barely understood himself and his luck; he simply basked in his pleasant situation and promised himself all kinds of further gains through his own efforts and his luck. This Francesco was, as gods and men know, devoid of knowledge of and also respect for the law, divine as well as human. He was involved in outrageous and criminal acts, lost in sensuality and disgraceful intrigues. He too loved to gamble at dice; he was a great flatterer, very lightheaded and vain, with a bold, aggressive, calculating and impudent spirit; by these means he had gained the position of archbishop (so shameless was Fortune) and now he vowed to storm heaven itself.

Together with Francesco Pazzi, whose deep-rooted vanity filled him with high hopes, Salviati had made plans long before, at Rome, it is said, to kill Lorenzo and Giuliano and to take over the Republic. Now in the suburban villa of Jacopo Pazzi, a place called Montughi, the whole faction was sworn to the crime, and Salviati himself drew up the oath.

The main leaders after him were Jacopo and Francesco Pazzi. Francesco was the son of Antonio, Jacopo's brother, and as he was naturally stubborn, he had grown fixed in his passion and arrogance. He was incredibly angry that the Medici family outshone him. He was always disparaging and underhandedly betraying Lorenzo and Giuliano in various way, sparing them no slander and no shame, stopping at nothing to do them what harm he could. He had spent some years at the Pazzi bank in Rome, for he felt that in Florence he had no standing compared to the Medici brothers, who were known for their goodness and strength of character. He shared the peculiar Pazzi irascibility to a surprising

extent. His stature was short, his body slender, and his color pale. He had blond hair, which he was overly concerned to keep well groomed. The mannerisms of his face and body revealed his prodigious insolence, and his great efforts, especially in first encounters, to cover this up were not very successful. He was a bloodthirsty person, besides, and the sort who, once he desired something in his heart, would go after it undeterred by considerations like honor, piety, fame, or reputation.

Jacopo Salviati, meanwhile, was the kind people find charming, with a smile and a joyful welcome for everyone at all times. He enjoyed the company of prostitutes and low company, but he also managed business deals with plenty of zeal and shrewdness.

There was a third Jacopo, too, involved in this affair, the son of Poggio, the well-known eloquent writer. This Jacopo, because his own resources were meager and his debts immense, and also because of a certain innate vanity, was eager to see an insurrection. His outstanding gift was for speaking ill of people, in which respect he even rivaled his venomous father. Thus he was always attacking the leaders of the city, or railing without discretion about everyone else's behavior, or mercilessly tearing apart some learned man's work. He was inordinately proud of his store of historical knowledge and his considerable eloquence, and paraded these talents in every circle of his acquaintances, to the point of boring his audiences. He had totally squandered his father's ample legacy in a few years, and thus was driven by poverty to become wholly devoted to the Pazzi-Salviati cause. Basically he remained what he had always been: for sale to any buyer.

There was a fourth Jacopo in the conspiracy, the brother of the archbishop, an altogether sordid and obscure person. Besides these there was Bernardo Bandini, a wicked, bold and shameless man, likewise driven by bankruptcy to plunge into any crime.

These were the seven citizens who undertook the deed. Add to them Giovanni Battista from the town of Montesecco, who was of the household of Duke Girolamo. Also Antonio of Volterra, who was drawn to the group either by the hatred of his people [Volterra had been sacked by permission of Lorenzo] or by a certain frivolous and unthinking tendency to follow others. The priest Stefano was another, the secretary of Jacopo Pazzi, a shameless fellow and one of whom all sorts of evil things

were said. He lived in the household of Jacopo performing a not very honorable function, as tutor to Jacopo's only daughter, conceived in adultery.

Renato and Guglielmo Pazzi, according to reports, were not unaware of the conspiracy. Guglielmo was married to Bianca, the sister of Lorenzo de' Medici, and had raised with her numerous children, so that he thought, as they say, he could straddle the fence. He was the older brother of Francesco, whom we have already described. Renato, on the other hand, was the son of Pietro, a man of knightly rank and a brother of Jacopo and Antonio. Renato, therefore, was a cousin on the paternal side of Guglielmo and Francesco. He was far from stupid, and he hid his great hatred and wrath, but his was a passionate nature, and though he was not bold, he would act decisively when it came time to do what he had been storing in his heart. He was tightfisted and avaricious, for which reason he was not popular with the masses. A member of Guglielmo's household called Napoleone Franzesi, furthermore, played no small part in the proceedings.

There were a number of more obscure participants in the crime, some from the archbishop's household and some from that of the Pazzi. Among them was a certain Brigliaino, a man of the lowest class, and Nanni, a wicked and quarrelsome Pisan notary.

But the one who played the largest part among the foreigners in this affair was Giovanni Battista, whom we have mentioned, from the household of Duke Girolamo. He had set the uprising, which was planned a full half-year before, for April 26, 1478, the Sunday before Ascension. He was a man of intelligence and foresight, a good planner and not inexperienced in these things. Salviato and all the conspirators had great faith in him.

The story itself requires that we now set forth the conspirators' plan.

The Medici family, splendid and magnificent in its style at all times, is especially so in the entertainment of notable visitors. No well-known man has visited Florence or Florentine territory but he has been offered magnificent hospitality by that house. When Cardinal Raffaello, therefore, the son of the sister of Duke Girolamo, had sojourned for a while at the country house of Jacopo Pazzi, where we noted that the conspiracy itself was sworn, the conspirators seized this opportunity for their great crime, and they sent word to the brothers in the cardinal's name that

they wished to be received at the Medici's suburban home in Fiesole. Lorenzo and I myself and Lorenzo's son Piero went there. Giuliano was kept away by illness and stayed at home, and that postponed the affair to the day we have mentioned. Again, they sent a servant to say that the cardinal would also like to be invited for dinner to the house in Florence—he wished to see the way the house was decorated, the draperies, the tapestries, the jewels and silver and elegant furnishings. The fine young men did not suspect a trap; they got their home ready, exhibited their beautiful things, laid out the linens, set out the metal and leather work and jewels in cases, and had a magnificent banquet ready.

A group of the conspirators appeared somewhat early, asking, "Where is Lorenzo? Where is Giuliano?" The servants said that both were in Santa Riparata, and that is where the group went, the cardinal out of sight in the choir according to custom. While the mass was being celebrated, the archbishop and Jacopo Poggio and the two Jacopo Salviatis, as well as some other companions, slipped out to go to the Signoria, there to oust the lords of Florence from their stronghold and to take over. The others stayed in the church to carry out the crime. Since Giovanni Battista, who had been appointed to kill Lorenzo, had refused the job, Antonio of Volterra and Stefano undertook it, while the rest got ready to fall upon Giuliano.

When the priest had taken the wine, the signal was given, and Bernardo Bandini, Francesco Pazzi and the rest of the conspirators clustered around Giuliano, encircling him. Their leader Bandini took his sword and ran it through the young man's breast. Giuliano, though fatally wounded, retreated a few steps; the others followed; he lost consciousness and fell to the ground; as he lay there Francesco struck him repeatedly with his dagger—thus they killed the noble youth. The servant in attendance on Giuliano, fainting with terror, rushed shamefully into hiding.

Meanwhile the assassins appointed to kill Lorenzo attacked him, and Antonio of Volterra first of all laid his hand on Lorenzo's left shoulder, aiming a dagger for his throat. Terrified, Lorenzo took off his cape and wrapped it over his left arm, drawing his sword from its sheath. As he was freeing himself, however, he suffered a wound, for he was cut in the neck. Then he turned on them, a powerful and furious man, sword in hand, facing his enemies and glancing about in readiness. They

were afraid and fled; nor were Andrea and Lorenzo Cavalcanti, who were his immediate attendants, slow to guard him. Cavalcanti's arm was wounded; Andrea came through unharmed.

It was amazing to see the crowd in confusion—men and women, priests and boys were running wherever their feet led. The whole place resounded with cries and moans, yet no words were clearly distinguishable; there were people who thought the church was collapsing.

Bernardo Bandini, the murderer of Giuliano, was not satisfied with that but now went after Lorenzo, who had rushed with a few others into the shelter of the sacristy. Pursuing Lorenzo, Bandini attacked Francesco Nori, a wise man and the manager of the Medici business, and gave him a fatal wound in the stomach with a single thrust of his sword; Nori's body, still breathing, was quickly dragged into the sacristy to which Lorenzo had retreated.

Having fled to the same place, I together with some other persons then got the bronze doors shut and so we held off Bandini. While we guarded the doors, some within feared for Lorenzo because of his wound and were anxious to do something about it. Antonio Rodolfo, the son of Jacopo Rodolfo, an impressive young man, sucked out the wound [in case there might be poison]. Lorenzo himself gave no thought to his own safety but kept asking how Giuliano was; he also made angry threats and lamented that his life had been endangered by people who had hardly any reason to attack him. A crowd of young men loyal to the Medici were pounding on the sacristy doors with their swords. They all shouted that they were friends and relatives: let Lorenzo come out, come out, before the other side returns with reinforcements! We inside were fearful and unsure whether these were friends or foes, and we kept asking whether Giuliano was safe. To this, they never replied. Then Sigismondo Stufa, a splendid young man and one who from childhood had been attached by bonds of great love and loyalty to Lorenzo, quickly climbed a ladder to a look out point, the organ gallery, from which he could see down into the church, and at once he knew what had been done, for he could see the body of Giuliano lying prostrate. He could also see that those who stood at the doors were friends, so he gave orders to open up; thronging around Lorenzo, they made an armed bodyguard for him and took him home by a side door so that he should not run across Giuliano.

Going out through the church towards home myself, I did come upon Giuliano lying in wretched state, covered with wounds and hideous with blood. I was so weakened by the sight that I could hardly walk or control myself in my overwhelming grief, but some friends helped me to get home.

There [at the Medici palace] armed men were everywhere and every room resounded with the cries of supporters, the roof rang with the din of weapons and voices. You saw boys, old men, youths, clergy and laymen all arming themselves to defend the Medici house as they would the public welfare.

The Pisan leader [Archbishop Francesco Salviati] meanwhile summoned Cesare Petrucci, the "Standard-Bearer of Justice" (as he is called), into a conference without witnesses, intending to kill him but saying that he wanted to tell him something on behalf of the pope. Certain Perugian exiles who had been aware of the plot had come to the Signoria and gathered in the chancery, which they thought a suitable place. They had closed the doors of that room but when the time came, they found that they could not open them [without a key]; thus they could be of no help to themselves or to their friends. Now, when Petrucci observed Salviati's nervous manner, he suspected some trick and called the guards to arms. Salviati was afraid and burst out of the room. Petrucci, in pursuit, ran right into Jacopo Poggio and had the courage to grab him by the hair and throw him to the ground, calling on the guards to hold him. The next minute Petrucci, with a small band of the Signori, had taken refuge high in the palace tower. There he guarded the door with a spit seized from the kitchen, (for fear and anger had made him seize this weapon), and so fought as best he could for his own and the public safety. Others too fought bravely for their lives. The palace of the Signoria is full of doors, and by closing many of the passages, the guards were able to separate the leading conspirators and channel them into many small currents lacking the original impact. The whole time all those of the Signoria were in an uproar within the building, while few citizens came to the spot.

Meanwhile, when Jacopo Pazzi realized that his hope of killing Lorenzo had been disappointed, fully aware of the seriousness of the crime in which he was involved, he struck his own face with both hands, then rushed home from the church and collapsed on the floor in anguish.

Seeing that the whole matter was still in crisis, however, he went forth to hazard his fortune and, with a few relatives, proceeded to the piazza and called the people to arms. He had no success, for everyone scorned him as a criminal (whose fear made him scarcely able to call out in a steady voice) and abominated his wicked deed. Seeing no help in the people, he trembled and completely lost heart. Those who had betaken themselves to the highest parts of the Signoria were throwing huge stones and lances at Jacopo. Terrified he returned home, and Francesco, who had been seriously wounded in this fray, abruptly fled with him.

Lorenzo's men, meanwhile, regained control of the Signoria. After the Perugians had broken down their door, they were cut down. Then the fury turned on others of the conspiracy. They hanged Jacopo Poggio out a window, and having seized the cardinal, they took him with a large guard to the Signoria, protecting him with difficulty from the attacks of the populace. Several of his former associates were killed by the people, and when they were completely stripped, were foully mutilated: soon a human head fixed on a lance appeared at Lorenzo's gate, and part of a shoulder was brought forth. Everywhere there was nothing so clearly to be heard as the voices of the people shouting, "Palle, palle," (the emblem of the Medici).

Jacopo Pazzi made up his mind to flee: at the exit known as the Gate of the Cross, he and his armed followers demanded passage and burst forth.

At the Medici palace, meanwhile, the people gathered full of marvelous zeal and love for the Medici, driving traitors to the place of execution, sparing no curse or threat as they herded the criminals to their punishment. The house of Jacopo Pazzi was barely defended from looters, and Pietro Corsini's men took the naked and wounded Salviati, who was already close to death, to the place of execution; it was no simple or easy matter to rein in the furious people. The Pisan leader was soon dangling from the same window as Francesco Pazzi, and his body hung above the other's lifeless corpse. When he was lowered, by chance or in mad fury he sank his teeth into the corpse of Francesco Pazzi (a marvel seen, I think, by everyone there and soon reported throughout the city), and even after the rope had choked him he kept his teeth fixed in the other's breast while his eyes stared madly. After him, the two Jacopos

from the Salviati family were hanged also, their necks broken by the rope.

I remember going to the piazza myself later (for things were already quiet at home), and seeing a multitude of lacerated corpses scattered here and there, visibly the objects of popular abuse and execration, for the Medici house was, for many reasons, in favor with the people. All abominated the murder of Giuliano, calling it an outrage that this outstanding young lord, the darling of Florentine youth, should be slain by trickery, crime and treason, cut down by persons who had least excuse for such an act and who belonged to a violent and sacrilegious clan hateful to both gods and men. The crowd was spurred by the recent memory of Giuliano's excellence, for only a few years earlier, he had won acclaim in a jousting tournament where his conspicuous prowess had won him the victory and the trophy. This was a feat to endear him greatly to the hearts of the crowd. There was, moreover, the enormity of the outrage, for one could not name or conceive of any crime to rival the hideousness of this. Everyone was indignant that a pious and innocent youth should have been cruelly slain at the altar, while taking part in a sacred rite. Religion and hospitality had been violated and the church polluted with human blood, while Lorenzo, himself, on whose single person the whole Florentine Republic depended, in whom the hopes and the resources of all the people were concentrated, had been attacked by armed men. Against all this there was deep indignation.

Soon, from all the various towns near the city, a large force of armed men streamed into the piazza of the Signoria, the other piazzas, and especially the Medici palace. Everyone was eager to show his own personal zeal—people flocking with their children and retainers to offer their help, protection, and support. All men declared that on Lorenzo alone their public and private well-being depended. For days you could see a continuous stream of arms pouring from everywhere into the Medici palace, as well as bread and meat and whatever else was available in the way of provisions. Neither his wound nor his fear nor his great sorrow for his brother's death prevented Lorenzo from overseeing his affairs. He received all the citizens, thanked them individually and exchanged greetings with them all. Since the public was anxious about his health, he had to appear often at the windows of the palace. There-

upon the whole people would acclaim him, cheer and wave, rejoice in his safety and revel in their joy. He in turn was determined to expedite all that had to be done, and never faltered in courage or in wisdom.

While this was the situation at Florence, it was reported that Giovan-Francesco da Tolentino, governor of the town of Forli, had crossed the border of Florentine territory with a picked troop of cavalry. Lorenzo Giustini, likewise, as many letters and messengers warned us, had come from Città di Castello and was invading from Sienese territory. But both were repulsed by our forces and retreated to their homes. Throughout the city, guards were posted during the dark hours of the night, also Lorenzo's house was carefully guarded, and there were armed men posted at the piazzas, in front of the Signoria, and all around the city. On the following day, Giovanni Bentivoglio of Bologna, a knight and lord of his own republic, who was closely allied by many favors to the Medici, came to Mugello with some squadrons of cavalry and many companies of infantry. The whole city had begun to fill up with infantry, but the Eight, fearful lest the soldiers begin rioting for loot, first picked a force to direct the protection of the city, and then ordered the rest, as soon as they had entered the city, either to return home or to go wherever they determined that they would be useful.

Renato Pazzi, meanwhile, who had retreated the day before the crime to his villa in Mugello and surrounded himself with soldiers, was taken captive with two brothers, Giovanni and Niccolò. Giovanni Pazzi, brother of Guglielmo and Francesco, was caught in a certain garden near his house. Abandoned now by all those who had followed him, Jacopo was pursued and captured in the village of Castaneto. The first to pursue him was a certain farmer named Alexander, a little over twenty years of age. He grabbed hold of him, and although Jacopo offered him seven pieces of gold in a plea to let him kill himself, he could not persuade him. When he continued to argue and plead, Alexander's brother beat him with a staff. Then the terrified man saw the truth of the saying: "Fate guides the willing man, and drags the unwilling." [Seneca *Ep.* 107, 11.] Taken thence to Florence with an armed escort from the Eight to keep the crowd from tearing him apart, he was brought to the Signoria and confessed the whole crime without being tortured; he was hanged a few hours later. Even as he faced death, he did not abandon his mad and furious ideas. He was giving up his soul to the devil, he cried. After

him, Renato was executed, and the other brothers were put in chains. The youngest, Galeatto, who was still a boy, tried in his terror to escape in the guise of a woman, but he was recognized and thrown into jail with the rest. Not much later, Andrea Pazzi, Renato's brother, was brought back from attempted flight and thrust into the same jail.

As he fled, Bandini encountered Lorenzo Giustini and by joining his ranks, escaped to Siena. Napoleone Franzesi arranged his own escape, aided by the knight, Piero Vespucci. Giovanni Battista of Montesecco was executed a few days later. Antonio of Volterra, the man who had wounded Lorenzo, and Stefano, the priest, hid for some days in a Florentine monastery. When their whereabouts were learned, the people flocked to the place and almost laid hands on the monks, whose religious scruples had prohibited their betraying the fugitives. They seized the assassins at last and foully mutilated them. Their noses and ears were cut off and they were severely beaten until, after confessing to the crime, they were dragged off to the gallows. Later, rewards were decreed and announced by the town crier for anyone who should kill or capture Bandini and Napoleone. Guglielmo Pazzi, who had taken refuge in Lorenzo's own palace hoping the bonds of kinship would save him, was exiled together with his children to a zone at least five miles but not more than twenty miles outside the city.

When Piero Vespucci's role in helping Napoleone Franzesi was uncovered, he too was immediately seized. (He had been dissipating his parents' property since earliest youth and was therefore denied his inheritance by his father's will. Poor at home and in debt to others, he was discontented with the status quo and eager for a change of government. As soon as Giuliano had been murdered, he was ready to praise the Pazzi crime, so abrupt and precipitate was his judgment. Soon afterwards, seeing the whole people and all the citizens on Lorenzo's side, he rushed out to plunder the Pazzi palace. There he encountered some soldiers who were gazing hopefully at the place with thoughts of looting, and he would—had not the remarkable young Pietro Corsini opposed his barbarities—have greatly endangered the whole city, with all its secular and religious establishments, so rabid and urgent was his attempt to incite the mob and soldiers to start looting.) He too was finally thrown into prison, and his son, Marco, was exiled to a distance of five miles from the city.

Many other deaths followed, and all the conspirators were either killed or put in chains or exiled.

When the news reached Rome, there was great sorrow, numerous embassies from all quarters, and extraordinary general relief that Lorenzo was safe.

The funeral of Giuliano was very magnificent and the solemn obsequies were celebrated in the church of San Lorenzo. Many youths dressed in mourning. Giuliano himself had been stabbed in nineteen places. He was twenty-five years of age.

A few days later, when heavy rains had come, a vast crowd of men from all parts of the country suddenly came into the city, crying that Jacopo Pazzi should not have been buried in sacred ground. The reason it had rained so long was that such a wicked man as he, who even in dying had shown no regard for religion or God, had been buried in a church, contrary to custom and sacred law. According to an old superstition of the peasants, this would hurt the grain, which was just filling out, and (as is the way with such things), all the people started repeating the assertion. The crowds finally gathered at Pazzi's tomb, exhumed the corpse, and reburied it near the edge of town.

The next day, monstrous as it seemed, a vast crowd of boys appeared as if inflamed by the mysterious torches of the Furies, and again exhumed the buried man, and almost stoned to death someone who tried to stop them. They seized the corpse by the rope that had choked him and dragged him through the entire city with taunts and jests. Some ran ahead and mockingly ordered the streets to be cleared for a great and special knight; others beat the cadaver with sticks and goad, chiding him not to be late since the citizens expected him in the Piazza of the Signoria. Then they took him to his own house and made him knock his head on the door, while calling out, "Who is within? Who will receive the lord returned with his train?" Forbidden to enter the Piazza, they moved on to the Arno and threw the body in. As it floated along, a large group of peasants followed it along the banks shouting insults. Someone is reported to have remarked, not inaptly, that he would have succeeded beyond his wildest dreams if, when alive, he had had the popular following he had in death.

By this upheaval and these changes I was repeatedly reminded of the instability of human fortune, and most of all was I struck by the in-

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credible grief of everyone for the death of Giuliano, whose physical appearance, character, and habits, I shall briefly sketch. He was tall and sturdy, with a large chest. His arms were rounded and muscular, his joints strong and big, his stomach flat, his thighs powerful, his calves rather full. He had bright lively eyes, with excellent vision, and his face was rather dark, with thick, rich black hair worn long and combed straight back from the forehead. He was skilled at riding and at throwing, jumping and wrestling, and prodigiously fond of hunting. Of great courage and steadfastness, he fostered piety and good morals. He was accomplished in painting and music and every sort of refinement. He had some talent for poetry, and wrote some Tuscan verses which were wonderfully serious and edifying. And he always enjoyed reading amatory verse. He was both eloquent and prudent, but not at all showy; he loved wit and was himself quite witty. He hated liars and men who hold grudges. Moderate in his grooming, he was nonetheless amazingly elegant and attractive. He was very mild, very kind, very respectful of his brother, and of great strength and virtue. These virtues and others made him beloved by the people and his own family during his lifetime, and they rendered most painful and bitter to us all the memory of his loss. Yet we pray to Almighty God that he may not forbid "this youth's helping our suddenly stricken generation." (Virgil *Georg.* I, 500.)