THE FLORENCE EFFECT

TURNING POINTS THAT TRANSFORM THE WAY YOU LIVE AND LEAD

Francesco Luigi Filippelli, Sandra Astuti

DEDICATION

We dedicate this book to our son, Fabio Luigi, and to all future young leaders, women and men who believe in their dreams and work to make them a reality, helping to make the world a better place.

INDEX

A Personal Invitation 1
Chapter 1 An Unexpected Encounter 3
Chapter 2 Turning Difficulties into Opportunities 24
Chapter 3 Find What Gives You Joy 34
Chapter 4 The Hypotheses That Guide the Way 53
Chapter 5 Overcoming Limiting Beliefs 65
Chapter 6 How to Get Better Results 84
Chapter 7 Cultivating a Positive Mindset 97
Chapter 8 Making the Best Use of Your Resources 105
Chapter 9 Learning to Look in the Right Place 122
Chapter 10 It's Up to Me to Choose My Direction 128
Epilogue Three paths before you 137
Message to the Reader 145
Start Your Journey 147
A Walk Through the Streets of Florence 150
Map of the itinerary 151
Index of Questions and Rules 152
Appendix 155
Acknowledgments 163
Bibliography 164
Authors 166

A Personal Invitation

There comes a moment in every life when you ask yourself:

Is this the life I chose?

Is this the life I want to live?

Florence knows those questions.

For centuries, this city has drawn people searching for something deeper than beauty. They arrive looking for inspiration. They leave having discovered something about themselves.

What makes Florence extraordinary is not that it offers answers. It teaches you how to ask better questions. And better questions lead to better choices.

This book is an invitation to that same journey.

Not to visit Florence as a tourist, but to experience what we call The Florence Effect: the quiet transformation that happens when beauty, history, wisdom, and personal reflection come together.

Through ten inspiring fables and ten conversations, you will walk beside a traveler in search of meaning. Along the way, Florence itself becomes the mentor, revealing timeless lessons on courage, purpose, resilience, trust, responsibility, and leadership.

We wrote these stories for anyone standing at a crossroads. For those who feel something is missing. For those who know change is necessary, but do not yet know where to begin.

Walk these streets with an open mind.

Let Florence ask you the questions that could change your life.

Before you begin, we'd like to leave you with these words from Ken Blanchard:

"In their wonderful book Francesco Filippelli and Sandra Astuti invite readers to embark on a pleasurable journey of self-discovery among famous Florentine landmarks. Walk with Leonardo and Dante through the streets of Florence, reflect on inspiring fables about personal and professional growth, and choose to live a life of joy, resilience, and success."

Ken Blanchard

Coauthor of *The New One Minute Manager*® and *Simple Truths of Leadership*

Your journey begins here.

Francesco Filippelli and Sandra Astuti

CHAPTER 1
AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

I got out of bed, stretched, and knew immediately that this would be a decisive day.

I yawned once more and stood up. It was a mild late-May morning in Florence, neither too hot nor too cold, perfect for a walk.

As I got ready, I felt the urge to do something different. I decided to have breakfast in the city center.

I drove out of the garage and headed toward Piazza Beccaria. I parked the car and stepped out into the open air of Piazza Annigoni. As usual, I took a peek at the stalls of the Mercatino delle Pulci, browsing through antique furniture, books, and all kinds of small odds and ends. I walked past the Teatro del Sale, where I'd spent so many evenings with friends: good food, music, always something interesting on stage. My mouth watered at the thought of the wafer cones with whipped cream. I also thought about Maria, the theater's founder, and the laughs we'd had at her shows, and her desire to offer, through art, culture, and food, a certain idea of what life could be.

The cafés along Borgo la Croce were already open, and the first groups of tourists were beginning to gather, following guides who led them through the streets, umbrellas raised.

In Florence, the choices are endless. The Uffizi, the Opera del Duomo Museum, the Cathedral with Brunelleschi's magnificent dome, the Ponte Vecchio. Everywhere you turn, there is beauty.

I was in a good mood, though I couldn't quite say why. My job was fine, and I had a wonderful family and good friends, yet something was missing. Small and large frustrations marked the passing days as I waited for work to end so I could go home.

I needed time to think, and I had decided to give that Saturday morning to myself. I hoped something might happen, though I didn't know what.

I walked along Borgo la Croce and reached Piazza Salvemini. I found myself at a crossroads. I could take Via dell'Oriuolo toward the Duomo, or continue along Borgo Albizzi toward Piazza della Repubblica.

I chose to have breakfast at Caffè Gilli, founded in 1733, an elegant café overlooking the square. It had once been a renowned literary meeting place for prominent Italian artists and writers of the twentieth century.

Walking along Via del Corso, I glanced at the shop windows and paused at my favorite shop for handmade ties and shirts, at number

51. I greeted Piero, the owner, a refined and courteous man who had often helped me choose elegant combinations.

Unhurried, I made my way to Piazza della Repubblica and stepped into the café, asking for a table outside so I could enjoy breakfast in the fresh morning air. I placed my order and took a seat.

A light breeze and the warmth of the sun made my skin feel pleasantly alive.

I was sitting in one of Florence's great squares, one that had been the heart of the city since Roman times.

At its center stood the Column of Abundance, marking the intersection of the ancient city's main streets, the Cardo and the Decumanus. Since the Middle Ages, this square had been the commercial hub of Florence, while Piazza della Signoria served as the political center, and Piazza del Duomo as its religious heart.

In 1871, when Florence briefly became the capital of Italy, the old Mercato Vecchio was demolished, with the exception of the Column of Abundance. In its place, Piazza della Repubblica was built, an elegant square framed by refined buildings, prestigious shops, and dominated by a triumphal arch.

At the top, barely visible from below, a marble plaque bears an inscription:

"The ancient center of the city, restored from centuries-old squalor to new life."

I wondered what it must have been like when a medieval market once filled this space.

The waitress arrived with a warm smile and set down my cappuccino, a cream-filled bombolone (doughnut), and a glass of water. I thanked her and began to enjoy my breakfast.

The bombolone was delicious, with the fine sugar on its surface lightly crunching under my teeth. Then came the best part: the cream. Smooth, delicate, perfectly balanced, with just a hint of lemon zest. It was, quite simply, a small moment of perfection.

I took a sip of the warm, frothy cappuccino and looked around.

To my right, a couple of Japanese tourists sat with their guide, enjoying croissants and orange juice. A little farther away, four young boys were laughing loudly, full of energy and life. Places like this are for people who enjoy being among others, who like to feel part of the flow of life.

After the Second World War, Caffè Gilli became a favorite meeting place for young Florentines and visitors alike. Just outside, Ruth Orkin's famous photograph *American Girl in Italy* (1951) was taken, capturing the spirit of that era.

At a nearby table, I noticed a distinguished gentleman. He was impeccably dressed, with a well-groomed gray beard and mustache. He wore a light linen suit with a matching waistcoat, a crisp white shirt, and a blue tie. He looked like a regular, reading his newspaper as if he were in his own living room.

When the waitress approached him, he looked up, and our eyes met for a brief moment. I felt slightly embarrassed at being caught watching him and gave him a small, polite smile. He smiled back, first at the waitress, then at me.

He said something to her as she set down his coffee and a plate of chocolate cream puffs. She smiled, and they exchanged a few words.

There's something disarming about genuine kindness. It costs nothing: a smile, a thank you, a small gesture of respect, yet it can turn someone's whole morning around.

I took another sip of my cappuccino and finished my doughnut with satisfaction.

"It's a cream-doughnut kind of morning," the gentleman at the next table said after finishing his coffee. "I'm more of a chocolate person myself, but everyone has their preferences," he added with a smile beneath his mustache.

"Well," I replied, slightly surprised that he was speaking to me, though I was the only one with a doughnut, "I felt like treating myself this morning."

"Good choice," he said. "A small treat is a great way to start the day. Just not every day, or you might find yourself on a diet," he added with a soft laugh.

Instead of being put off by the intrusion, I found myself intrigued. I began to study him more closely.

He looked to be around fifty-five, though he carried himself with an energy that made him seem younger. He was elegantly dressed but not ostentatiously with so a rare balance. He could have been a university professor or a doctor, someone well established, though not a typical business executive, at least not at first glance.

He wore a wedding ring on his left hand, and a distinctive silver ring on the middle finger of his right, engraved with a symbol I couldn't quite make out from where I sat. A small brooch bearing the Florentine lily adorned the breast pocket of his jacket. His brown leather shoes looked both comfortable and finely crafted.

The waitress returned with his bill.

"Here you are, engineer," she said, handing him the receipt. "Will I see you tomorrow morning?"

"Not tomorrow," he replied, placing a banknote on the saucer. "My son is coming back from the United States, and we'll be spending some time together."

"You should all come here," the waitress said with a laugh.

"You know, that's not a bad idea, Chiara," he replied, calling her by name and confirming that he was a regular.

The waitress walked away. The man, whom I now thought of as "the engineer," looked at me and smiled.

I searched for something intelligent to say. Nothing came. I didn't want to risk sounding awkward. He was probably thinking about his own affairs, perhaps already imagining the moment he would embrace his son after such a long time abroad.

Then I realized, unmistakably, that he was smiling at me.

"So," he said, "bombolone, treats, and breakfast in the city center on a Saturday morning…" He paused, letting the moment hang in the air. "Would you like to chat?" he added, gesturing toward the empty chair beside him.

"Oh my God," I thought. I had wanted to sit alone for a while, to take stock of things, and now here I was, face to face with a pleasant stranger. Pleasant, yes, but still a stranger. What could he possibly want from me?

Refusing would have felt rude, and I didn't want to be impolite to someone who was clearly kind to everyone.

"Of course," I said, forcing a slight smile. He noticed, but pretended not to.

"You're probably wondering why I invited you to join me," he said, reading my thoughts.

"I like people," he continued, without waiting for a reply. "And I have a bit of a sixth sense for knowing when someone might need a good listener."

"A good listener?" I said, not entirely convinced.

"Yes, a good listener. Let me introduce myself. My name is Dante Pini," he said, extending his hand.

I sat down and shook it, realizing that this unexpected situation was beginning to interest me. It is rare to meet truly engaging people, and this man seemed to be one of them.

"Nice to meet you. Leonardo Innocenti."

"Well, Leonardo, do you mind if we use first names? Formalities create distance, and distance rarely leads to honest conversation."

"Of course," though it felt strange to call a distinguished man by his first name when I'd known him for all of five minutes.

"So, Leonardo, did you enjoy your breakfast?"

"It was excellent," I said, aware that this was simply a way to break the ice.

"I come here often, as you've probably noticed," he said, gesturing toward the tables around us. "I enjoy a good breakfast, but I also like observing people. Not just those sitting here, but passersby as well. I try to imagine their lives, their stories. It's a simple pastime, but sometimes it leads to interesting encounters and meaningful conversations."

"Interesting," I said, though I was actually thinking the man was a little unusual. "What kind of conversations?"

"It depends on the person," he replied. "I saw you, and I thought that perhaps, just perhaps, you might be open to a conversation. If you are, of course."

"Yes, why not?" I replied. "My plan this morning was to take a break and sort out my thoughts. If you don't mind me asking, what do you do? I heard the waitress call you 'engineer.'"

"Well," he said with a smile, "I studied engineering many years ago. But I didn't enjoy it very much. What really interests me is people, their success, and their sense of fulfillment."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked, surprised. "Are you some kind of psychologist?"

"No, not at all. But there's a reason for my interest in people and what they achieve. For many years, I had the opportunity to work closely with all kinds of individuals. My job allowed me to travel and encounter different cultures and ways of thinking.

"Over time, I saw the same patterns repeat themselves: frustration, complaints, broken dreams, and disappointment. And I came to believe that the starting point for finding meaning in what we do is having chosen it freely."

He let the sentence trail off, as if expecting me to challenge him.

"That's not so easy, Dante," I replied. "We can try to move toward our goals, but we also have to deal with reality.

"There are bills to pay. Many people have mortgages. If you have children, there are school fees, books, clothes, phones, activities. It's easy to talk about freedom of choice, but much harder to live it.

"Of course, things are different if you come from money, or if your family already has a successful business you can step into. But for most people, you still have to work hard."

"That's true, Leonardo," he said, looking at me intently. "Some people do start with advantages. That's undeniable. But let's not focus on the exceptions.

"Think about the majority of people, those who are neither rich nor poor. Compared to fifty years ago, they have access to knowledge and learning opportunities that were once unimaginable.

"What percentage of the world's population would you say that represents?"

"A large one," I said. "Seventy, maybe eighty percent."

"Exactly. Let's consider that group. In principle, they can go to school, they have institutions that offer protection, and access to healthcare. Their basic needs can be met.

"And yet so many of them end up doing work they don't enjoy, living unhappy lives. Why?"

He left the question hanging, placing the weight of the answer on me.

"I don't know," I said after a moment. "It's a complex question. If I think about my own life, I'm not even sure whether I truly enjoy what I do. And I certainly can't answer for everyone else.

"Besides, I'm not even sure that being completely happy would be a good thing. A certain level of dissatisfaction pushes me forward. If I were too comfortable, maybe I wouldn't take action at all."

"That's fair," he said. "Then let's try something simpler. Let's build a few basic hypotheses we can explore."

He ordered a bottle of water, as if the conversation itself had made him thirsty.

I took some time to think. The silence between us felt surprisingly natural, not awkward at all.

"Well," I said at last, "first, I think we often end up doing what makes our parents happy. We follow their expectations, because they genuinely believe they're guiding us in the right direction.

"Second, we tend to choose paths that offer financial security and stability. It's easier to find a solid job as an engineer or a doctor than as a painter or a philosopher, even though, thankfully, there are still painters and philosophers in the world."

"Finally, the root cause is that we don't even ask ourselves the question when we are young, when we are still able to choose.

"If we like something and know that it will make our parents happy, we tend to go in that direction without much conviction or

real self-awareness. Sometimes, as we said earlier, we intentionally ignore what we truly like and what we should honestly explore.

"We give too much weight to whether the market can support what we actually want to do. When we grow frustrated, with the world and with ourselves, and realize we're not happy with the path we've chosen, we tell ourselves it's too late to change, that we don't know how to do it, and we end up disrupting the balance between our family life and the world we have built.

"Yes, that's how I see it," I added.

"And when you try to discover who you really are, you rarely find someone who truly supports you and knows how to guide you. You feel stuck, with no way out," I concluded, a little too theatrically, perhaps.

As I said those words, I had the uncomfortable feeling that I was also speaking about myself, and I wasn't entirely pleased.

"That moment of discomfort, Leonardo, when you recognize yourself in your own words, is already a turning point," Dante said. "Now we have three working hypotheses, which I would summarize this way," he continued.

In the meantime, he had asked the waitress for a pen and paper and began writing in clear, neat handwriting:

"Hypothesis 1: I don't ask myself what I want because my priority is to make others happy. My priority is psychological safety.

"Hypothesis 2: I ask myself the question, but my priority is a well-paid and stable job. I am searching for economic security.

"Hypothesis 3: I ask myself the question and explore how I would like to live my life by making unconventional choices, but I stop myself from going down that path because I believe it will be too difficult. When we ask the same question as adults, we fear putting the stability we have created at risk, and we are afraid of uncertainty. Nobody likes facing real change."

"Is that accurate?" Dante asked, turning the notebook toward me.

"Yes, it's all accurate so far," I said, curious about where he was going. I thought it was a bit too engineer-like, but at the same time I appreciated the fact that we had adopted an almost scientific way of proceeding, rather than just talking vaguely. I was beginning to think that this unusual discussion could actually help me clarify my thoughts.

"Well," Dante resumed, "now let's explore them together. What do you think of the first hypothesis?"

"Actually," I said with a slight smile, "I thought you were going to give me the answer."

He smiled and continued, undisturbed.

"I will," he said. "But it's important that you explore your own hypotheses first, don't you think?"

"All right," I said. "Then I think… I think it's probably the most common reason for bad choices.

"Our parents and environment naturally shape us. They raise us and want what is best for us. They want to see us happy. It is right for a parent to give guidance and direction.

"But it is not right for them to abdicate their role completely or, on the contrary, to make decisions in place of their children. Children are autonomous individuals with their own personalities, but it is also true that their knowledge of the world is still limited.

"What helps is to provide objective information that allows them to make informed choices. Not advice, but clear information. It becomes a problem when parents become intrusive and make choices for their children. Later in life, the consequences can be significant: lost years of study and resentment.

"It is important to help them identify areas of interest, speak with people who attend those schools or universities, and take part in open days and meetings with professors.

"Young girls and boys are naturally open to learning. If you encourage them to explore different choices and support them, you give them a great gift: the opportunity to realize their unique potential.

"When someone has to make an important decision, they need time and space to reflect and decide for themselves."

"I like your insight," Dante said. "And it seems to me that you're speaking from personal experience. You remind me of a fable about a farmer's daughter and a clock."

"A farmer's daughter and a clock?" I asked, curious.

"Yes," Dante said, smiling.

"Great, I like inspiring stories. I'm curious," I said, resting my elbow on the table.

Dante took a sip of water and began.

The Precious Wristwatch

In a region of northern Italy, there was a large farm. Michele was the owner, and every day he would go to the fields and stables to check how the work was progressing. As is often the case in the countryside, there was always something to do.

Michele had a daughter named Alessandra, who was about to turn eighteen.

She had to decide whether to attend university in the city or follow in her parents' footsteps and work on the farm. However, she was undecided. Her father, Michele, and her mother, Maria, both had strong personalities and energetic temperaments. They woke at dawn each day and spent long hours working and managing the practical tasks of the farm.

Alessandra admired them, but she knew she was different.

She tried to be like her parents and sometimes succeeded, but she found it difficult to sustain that way of being. She had a more reflective nature and needed time to think things through calmly. Unlike her parents, who tended to act quickly when faced with a problem, Alessandra preferred to reflect before deciding.

When her eighteenth birthday arrived, her parents organized a large celebration at the farm. A long table was set with a white tablecloth and fine dishes, and relatives and friends gathered to celebrate with her.

After the meal came the gifts. Alessandra received them all with joy, but one touched her more than any other: a gold wristwatch that had belonged to her grandmother.

She had been very close to her grandmother, Livia, who had spent hours telling her stories and instilling in her a love of literature and poetry. Although she had married a farmer and lived in the countryside, Livia had attended university and graduated in literature. She had passed away a few years earlier, during Alessandra's adolescence, and Alessandra deeply missed her support and her free spirit.

For this reason, the gift meant a great deal to her.

She hugged her parents to thank them. While the others lingered over coffee and grappa, chatting about the upcoming grape harvest,

Alessandra wound the watch and went for a walk, wearing her beautiful gift.

She followed the path toward the stables and stopped to visit Bianchino, her favorite calf.

After a few peaceful moments, she returned toward the group. Suddenly, she felt a sharp sense of panic: the watch was no longer on her wrist.

"Oh no… how will I tell Mom and Dad?" she thought.

She was deeply upset. The watch was precious, not only for its value, but for what it represented.

"But it must be nearby," she told herself. "I have to find it."

She gathered her courage and told her parents. Within minutes, everyone was searching, turning over stones, retracing every step.

Her father reassured her that it had to be close and that they would find it.

Hours passed. Evening came, but despite the long search along the path and the stables, there was no sign of the watch.

As darkness approached, her parents suggested stopping the search for the time being. Alessandra was distraught, but it was nearly impossible to continue in the dark. More than thirty people had searched everywhere without success.

But Alessandra was not someone who gave up easily.

Something within her told her to keep searching, but in a different way.

When her parents returned home, she asked to try one last time on her own. She had an idea. She waited until everyone had left.

Then she went back to the stables.

She walked slowly along the path, stopping every few steps. Once inside, she closed the door behind her. Holding her breath, she focused and gathered her thoughts.

In the absolute silence, she heard something.

A faint sound.

She closed her eyes, concentrated, and recognized the unmistakable ticking of the watch.

Her heart leapt in her chest. Her new approach was working.

She stood still and listened carefully, trying to locate the source of the sound. It was coming from the calf's trough. She began searching through the feed, and suddenly her hand touched something solid.

She pulled it out. It was the watch.

Overwhelmed with relief and joy, she returned home.

Not only had she found the precious wristwatch, but she had also learned a lesson that would help her better understand her path in life.

"That's the end of the fable," Dante said, pouring himself a little water and giving me time to reflect.

"She changed her strategy and asked herself a new question: 'Is there another way to find it?'" I said.

"You're on the right track," Dante said, pleased with my reasoning.

"When you keep doing the same things, you'll keep getting the same results. The only alternative is to count on a stroke of luck, hoping that something will change by chance," I continued. Dante looked at me, listening in silence.

"Alessandra reconsidered the situation and the nature of the watch until she realized that it produced a sound, very faint, but still audible in complete silence if she focused."

"I think you've hit the nail on the head," Dante replied. "But why do you think she had a clearer idea of what she wanted to do with her life after that?"

"Maybe because she understood that you can achieve results that matter by discovering your talents and developing them."

"That's one way to look at it," Dante said. "And what do you think Alessandra would have done next, after that moment of awareness?"

"Now she might choose to study something in which she can truly excel. She could become a researcher, a teacher, whatever she wants, as long as it brings her a sense of fulfillment."

That fable did more to make me think about my own talents than any leadership book or corporate training I'd sat through.

"I'm glad you liked it, Leonardo," Dante said. "Now, if you still have time, I'd like to take a walk. I want to visit a friend who has a shop at the bottom of Via de' Calzaiuoli."

I agreed, and as we began to walk, I wrote a note on my phone:

How much are you struggling with everyday tasks?

RULE 1

Fable: The Precious Wristwatch

Question: How much are you struggling with everyday tasks?

Rule: Be quiet. Listen to yourself. It will help you see things from a different perspective.

WRITE DOWN YOUR NOTES AND ACTIONS:

And now, how are you living your life?

How much are you struggling with everyday tasks?

_____

_____

_____

_____

CHAPTER 2
TURNING DIFFICULTIES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

We walked unhurriedly among the tourists, who were busy taking photographs and checking their phones for information.

"Her name is Marta. She restores furniture," Dante said.

"How nice! I've always been fascinated by restoration," I replied, eager to stretch my legs as we approached Marta's shop.

"She's an expert in her field," Dante continued, "and she has a gift for helping people figure out what they're truly passionate about it."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked as we walked toward Piazza del Duomo along Via degli Speziali.

"She discovered her passion for restoration later in life," Dante said.

"And she had the courage to act on it. She worked hard, built a circle of regular customers, and now she's doing well.

"But it wasn't always that way. At first, no one understood her decision to change her life and pursue her dreams. Everyone was quick to remind her of what she stood to lose, and of the risks involved in starting something new. At one point, she almost gave in. But eventually, something unexpected happened.

"A friend told her a story about a woman who had changed her destiny. Marta was inspired by a Florentine noblewoman named Ginevra degli Amieri, who lived in the fourteenth century."

"I've never heard of her," I said. "What did Ginevra do that was so remarkable, that it could inspire someone six hundred years later?"

"Well, she made a very bold and courageous decision," Dante said, stopping on the sidewalk and pointing not far ahead.

"Look over there. This part of the city was rebuilt during the Renaissance, after the medieval center was cleared to make space for Piazza del Duomo. Via del Campanile isn't far from here, but in ancient times it was known as the Street of Death, precisely because of the legend of Ginevra degli Amieri.

"But we're almost at Marta's shop now. She can tell you the story herself, if you're interested."

"Of course," I replied enthusiastically, intrigued by the strange and slightly unsettling nature of the story.

We entered the shop, and a small bell above the door announced our arrival.

"Hello, Dante! What a pleasure to see you!" Marta exclaimed, embracing him. "The work is progressing well, though it's not finished yet," she added, pointing to a beautiful dark walnut desk with an inlaid top and refined details.

"Don't worry, I just stopped by to see how things were going and to introduce you to Leonardo, a young friend I met this morning at the café," Dante said, gesturing toward me.

"Welcome to my workshop, Leonardo," Marta said with a smile. "Do you like antique furniture?"

"Oh yes, very much," I replied, looking around at the antique pieces and valuable objects that filled the room.

"I'm intrigued by what Dante told me," I said. "He mentioned that you started this work after being inspired by a fourteenth-century woman named Ginevra, if I understood correctly."

"Yes, that's right," Marta replied. "Ginevra degli Amieri, or Almieri, as some say. Until I heard her story, I had never found the courage to change my career. I decided to open this shop even though everyone was against it."

She sat down in an armchair upholstered in blue damask and gestured for us to take two elegant chairs opposite her.

"Reflecting on Ginevra's determination never to give up, I realized that we only live once, and that sometimes unexpected opportunities can arise from difficult situations," she said.

"How could a woman who lived six hundred years ago change your mindset?" I asked.

"You'll understand when you hear her story," Marta replied. "Perhaps it will be useful to you and to whoever you choose to share it with."

Then she began to speak.

The Love of Ginevra degli Amieri

This fable is based on events that took place in Florence.

At the end of the fourteenth century, a terrible epidemic struck Florence. The citizens were terrified, and many died. To prevent further contagion, the dead were quickly buried together in mass graves just outside the city walls.

The nobility remained inside their homes, venturing out only when strictly necessary, and moving quickly through the streets.

A young noblewoman named Ginevra degli Amieri was also afraid of death because of what was happening in the city. She avoided contact with anyone outside her family.

One day, during one of these rare outings, she touched the door of her own house and became infected. She fell seriously ill with the plague, and her condition immediately seemed desperate. After two days of agony, she died.

Her family could not keep her body at home, and on the same evening, at ten o'clock, a priest conducted her funeral. Her body was placed in the ancient crypt of Santa Reparata beneath the Cathedral.

Then everyone went home, and the church fell silent.

But something extraordinary was about to happen.

At two in the morning, Ginevra awoke from a state of apparent death. She realized she had been buried alive.

She was disoriented. Everything around her was dark. She needed air.

Terrified, she began to scream, but no one could hear her.

She felt despair closing in.

Summoning all her strength, she managed to move the stone slab that sealed the tomb and climb out. She breathed again, slowly regaining her strength.

She pushed open the church door and stepped into the street.

Still wrapped in the white shroud of the dead, Ginevra walked toward her home. She followed the street of the bell tower and finally reached the house. With the last of her strength, she knocked on the door.

Her husband opened the door and mistook her for a ghost. Frightened, he refused to let her in and drove her away.

Ginevra then went to her parents' house. But they too believed she was her own restless spirit wandering through Florence. They shut the door, leaving her outside in the cold night.

Desperate and unsure of what to do, she remembered her first love, Antonio Rondinelli.

Ginevra went to his house. Antonio opened the door, looked at her, and embraced her. At last, she had found shelter.

After seven days in the Rondinelli household, Ginevra regained her strength.

After recovering, Ginevra reflected on everything she had been through. She realized that something profoundly positive could emerge from what had happened.

Her family and her husband considered her dead.

So why not take this unexpected opportunity to live the life she had always wanted, with her first love?

The Rondinelli were a modest family, far removed from the social world of the wealthy Amieri. Ginevra's marriage had been arranged, and she had never loved her husband.

So, Ginevra and Antonio decided to marry.

She went to the bishop, told him her story, and asked for an annulment. She convinced him that, after escaping death itself, she deserved a second chance at life.

Her husband did not oppose the request. On the contrary, he accepted it willingly, as it also meant freedom for him.

Ginevra and Antonio Rondinelli married and began a new life, made possible by her extraordinary courage and determination.

A young woman who had not surrendered, not even to death.

"That is the fable," Marta concluded, looking at me with a smile.

"It's unbelievable," I said, wide-eyed. "Is this a true story?"

"Yes, it is based on real events," Marta replied. "And inspired me, even after six hundred years."

"It's a strange story," I said. "A woman, believed dead, wandering through Florence at night in a burial shroud. And yet, it has great emotional power."

"What struck you the most?" Dante asked.

It occurred to me that this was not the first time Marta had told this story in her workshop.

"I was struck by the fact that Ginevra never gave up, even in an objectively terrible situation," I said.

"Many of us would have given up, trapped in a crypt beneath a heavy stone slab. But she kept fighting.

"In the end, what changed everything was her ability to keep thinking, to keep generating ideas, even when her own family believed she was a ghost.

"When she thought of her first love, she changed the course of events."

"Good observation, Leonardo," Marta said, nodding. "What else?"

"Another important point is that people often judge based on appearances.

"At first, her relatives mistook her apparent death for real death. Later, they mistook a living person for a ghost.

"Before judging, we need to stop and think, especially when the stakes are high, for ourselves or for others."

"I like that perspective," Marta said. "But then how does Antonio succeed where the others fail?"

"Because he sees her through the eyes of love.

"He wanted Ginevra to be alive. He hoped for it, beyond what seemed reasonable.

"Only true love, whether for a person or for a purpose, can be powerful enough to help us achieve what seems impossible.

"After all, Antonio had seen her in the tomb and attended her funeral, just like the others. And yet, he chose to believe. Willpower, resilience, and love transformed the situation," I said, inwardly pleased with my insight.

Marta and Dante smiled. They agreed.

All in all, that morning was turning out to be more interesting than I could ever have imagined.

We decided to go for lunch, and Dante reminded us that an excellent trattoria nearby served a fantastic pappa al pomodoro.

I paused for a moment to reflect and wrote the following question in my notes:

What adversities are you facing in your life? What opportunities might arise from the way you deal with them?

RULE 2

Fable: The Love of Ginevra degli Amieri

Question: What adversity are you facing in your life?

Rule: Turn difficulties into opportunities. You can learn a great deal from challenging situations.

WRITE DOWN YOUR NOTES AND ACTIONS:

Have you been facing adversity in your life?
How have you dealt with it?

_____

_____

_____

_____

AUTHORS



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