

"A visual and literary feast.... Haunting."

~ Mary Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*

an  
illustrated novella  
of Venice



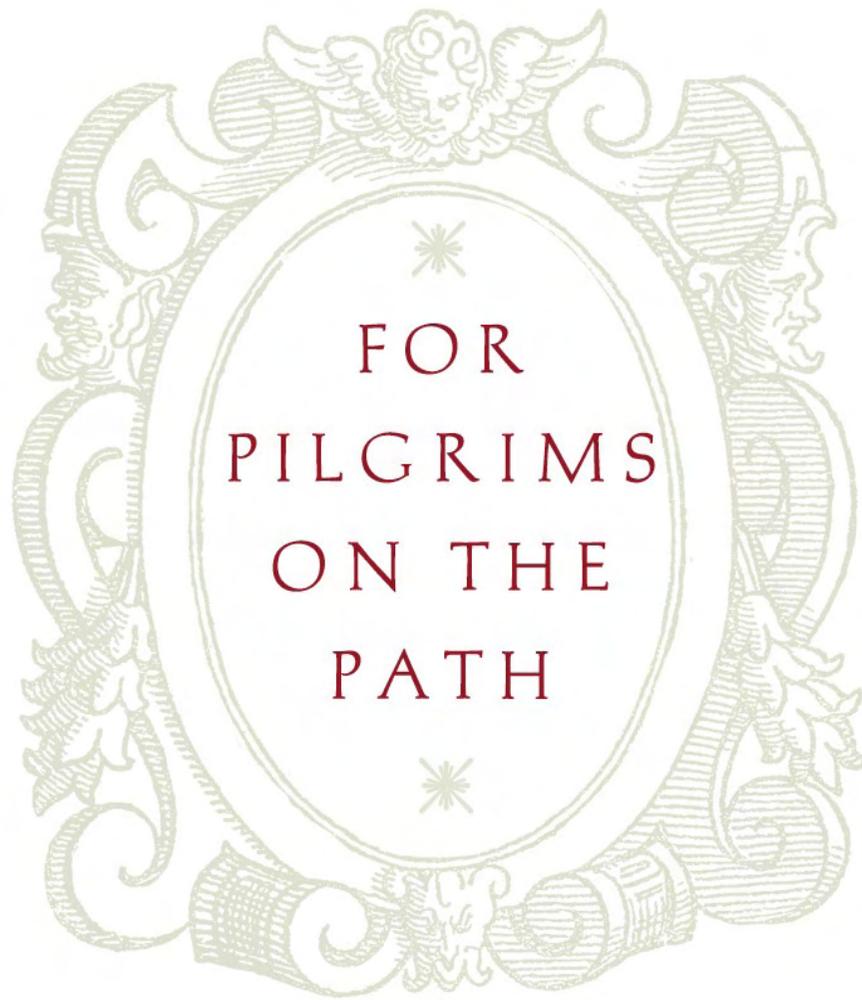
THE  
LOVER'S  
PATH



special  
launch price  
\$3.99  
until 7/5

KRIS WALDHERR

author of *The Book of Goddesses and Doomed Queens*



## PRAISE FOR THE LOVER'S PATH



“Prepare to be transported to 16th century Venice from the first page. This novel is a feast—a full-color picture book for adults that tells a wrenching story of eternal love.” —*NPR Books*

“Beautiful in every way; not only is the story of the girl’s secret and ultimately dangerous love wonderfully told, but the exquisite illustrations and layout make you feel that you have truly fallen into old Venice with its longing and eroticism.... You must own this lovely, lovely book!” —*Stephanie Cowell, bestselling author of Claude and Camille and Marrying Mozart*

“*The Lover’s Path* is a visual and literary feast.... The star-crossed lovers are a celebrated courtesan’s virginal and over-protected young sister and a cardinal’s illegitimate son.... Haunting.” —*Mary Sharratt, award-winning author of Daughters of the Witching Hill and Illuminations: A Novel of Hildegard von Bingen*

“With this illustrated novel, Waldherr has spun a wondrous story spilling over with mythological figures, with tarot cards and personal letters. You’re pulled into a vortex of a 16th century romance centered on Filamena Ziani, the younger sister of a famous courtesan in Venice.” —*The Albuquerque Journal*

“Voluptuous illustration and enthralling narrative ... in this extraordinary testament to the strength of the feminine spirit.” —*WNBC/By the Book*

“Kris Waldherr’s *The Lover’s Path* plunges readers into the mysterious and exhilarating world of sixteenth-century Venice.... A visual adventure.” —*Women in the Arts, the Magazine of the National Museum of Women in the Arts*

\* AN ILLUSTRATED NOVELLA \*

KRIS WALDHERR

THE  
LOVER'S  
PATH



## INTRODUCTION

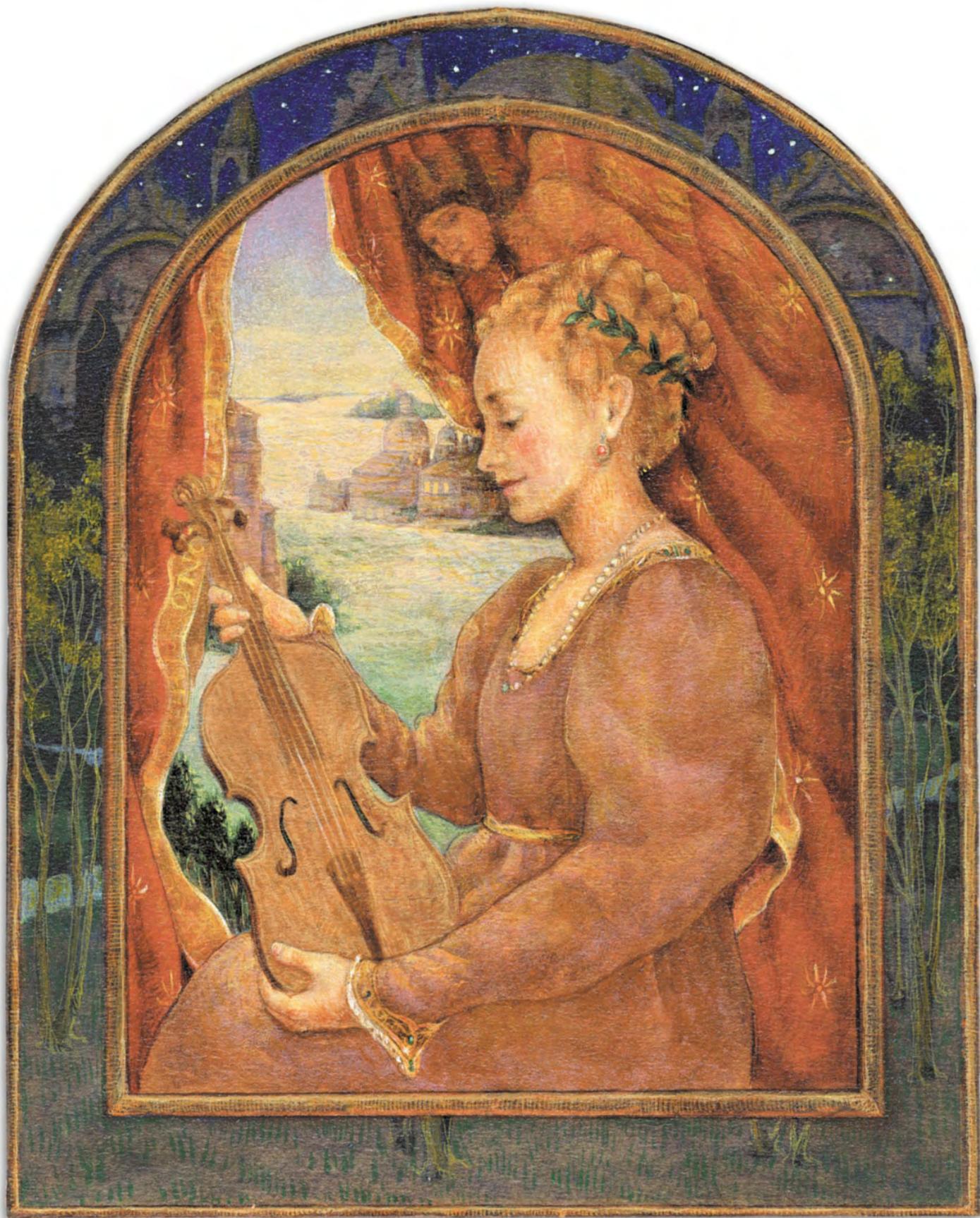


Sixteenth-century Venice was a rich *mélange* of cultural influences arising from the steady interaction of intellectuals, artists, diplomats, travelers, and merchants. Yet this liberal world offered women few roles to aspire to outside of wife, mother, and nun. Those able to transcend conventional boundaries succeeded only as a result of extraordinary talent, beauty, or wealth.

This book was written by one such woman—a woman brave enough to let her voice resound at a time when most of her gender lived silent, restricted lives. It is dedicated to another woman, a generous and powerful patroness who had won the author’s trust. And now it is offered to you.

We at the Museo di Palazzo Filomela are pleased to present the first English language publication of *The Lover’s Path* (*La Via dell’Amante*), written in 1543 by the Palazzo’s most noted resident, the musician Filamena Ziani.

Filamena Ziani (1510–1567) sang at a time when ensembles of professional female singers, called *concerto della donne*, would begin to gain favor at courts throughout Italy. She had the good fortune to live in Venice, which by the mid-sixteenth century ranked as the most important musical city in Europe. In acknowledgement of her musical gifts, Ziani was known to her contemporaries as La Filomela; *filomela* is the Italian poetic word for



*Above: Portrait identified as Filamena Ziani, 1531.*

“nightingale,” derived from the Latin *philomela*. In classical mythology, Philomela is the name of a princess who escaped attackers by transforming herself into a sweetly singing nightingale—an appropriate endearment for a woman who used her musical talents to escape the limitations of a world in which women had little freedom and few choices.

Ziani dedicated *The Lover's Path* to her patroness Felicita Lando, the daughter of the Doge of Venice. Sumptuary laws enacted in 1543 contributed to Ziani's decision to publish *The Lover's Path* in 1544. Some of these laws

prohibited women who chose unconventional lives from wearing pearls and other luxury items in public, thus condemning them as prostitutes. This situation made it urgent for Ziani, as a female performer, to protect herself and her livelihood by definitely establishing her role as a respected musician in Venetian society. Written partly in response to gossip about the author's past, *The Lover's Path* takes the form of an extended confession recounting the *fiaba*, or fairy tale, of a young woman's forbidden love. Woven within Ziani's narrative are illustrations of famous lovers, their archetypal stories serving as allegorical commentary upon her personal experiences.



*Interior pages, La Via dell' Amante, 1544.*

Because of its sensitive subject matter, *The Lover's Path* was quickly suppressed upon publication. Despite this, the book protected Ziani's reputation as a musician; her fame grew beyond her native city. A German traveler wrote in a 1547 letter, "The fashion in Venice is to brag of how one wept upon hearing La Filomela sing. Some believe this is a sign of a pure

A map of sixteenth century Venice.



heart.” Ziani’s talents accrued her enough wealth to purchase the building comprising the Palazzo Filomela (*below right*), where she resided until her death in 1567.

*The Lover’s Path* achieved wider recognition in the mid-nineteenth century, when the Palazzo Filomela was opened to the public as a museum and Ziani’s book, along with many of her personal artifacts, were exhibited for the first time. John Ruskin visited the Palazzo Filomela during an extended stay in Venice while writing *The Stones of Venice*, and was inspired by the woman who wrote and sung so persuasively of lost love. The opera composer Richard Wagner, who lived in the nearby Palazzi Giustinian as he worked on the second act of *Tristan and Isolde*, was intrigued by Ziani’s invocation of that story in *The Lover’s Path*.



Despite this resurgence of interest, Ziani's name has suffered the fate of many female artists of the Italian Renaissance. She has been forgotten, and her work neglected, except by those who chance upon her former home at the Museo di Palazzo Filomela.



*The theme of love transcends time. This has made our work of adapting *The Lover's Path* for modern audiences an uncomplicated and joyful labor.*

The book design for this edition was inspired by the 1544 publication. Several illustrations have been adapted from tarot cards in the Museo's collection. Others were inspired by the frescoes adorning the interior of the Museo di Palazzo Filomela, which Ziani commissioned for the main hall. These illustrations replace the woodcuts used in the original edition. Other art was adapted from a travel journal reputed to have been one of Ziani's favorite possessions. A partial museum catalog appears at the end of this volume.

It is our hope that this new edition of *The Lover's Path* will free the nightingale from her cage to sing for a new generation.

—MARINA ROSSETTI  
*Curator, Museo di Palazzo Filomela*  
*Dorsoduro, Venice*



# THE LOVER'S PATH





HERE BEGINS THE LOVER'S PATH  
IN WHICH JOY AND SORROW  
ARE JOINED AS  
ONE.



LIFE IMPRISONS ME.  
I YEARN FOR FREEDOM.

A caged nightingale witnessed an angel's flight upon the lover's path. Desperate for escape, the nightingale promised to love him forever if would free her. Beguiled by her song, the angel unlocked her cage. Together they flew into the heavens, the nightingale's music coaxing the angel ever higher. Alas, the angel did not notice when he drew too close to the sun, and his wings caught fire. Unable to save himself, he plunged into the sea. But not all was lost: the nightingale flew away, captive no more.



*Dedication to  
my Revered Patroness Felicita Lando  
upon the occasion of her marriage on January 15, 1543  
by her Loyal Musician  
Filamena Ziani.*

Most Esteemed Lady, I offer you this book in honor of the gracious consideration and infinite generosity you have shown me for these many years. Within these pages, you will find at last revealed the *fiaba* of the lover's path, which so many have spoken of as the story of the nightingale and the angel. I pray, modest as my tale may be, that it will express my gratitude for the kindnesses you have shown me, as well as my joy in your new union. I also hope it will reveal that which I know to be true: to truly love another, you must follow the lover's path wherever it may take you.

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✱ I ✱



*la grazia*  
G R A C E



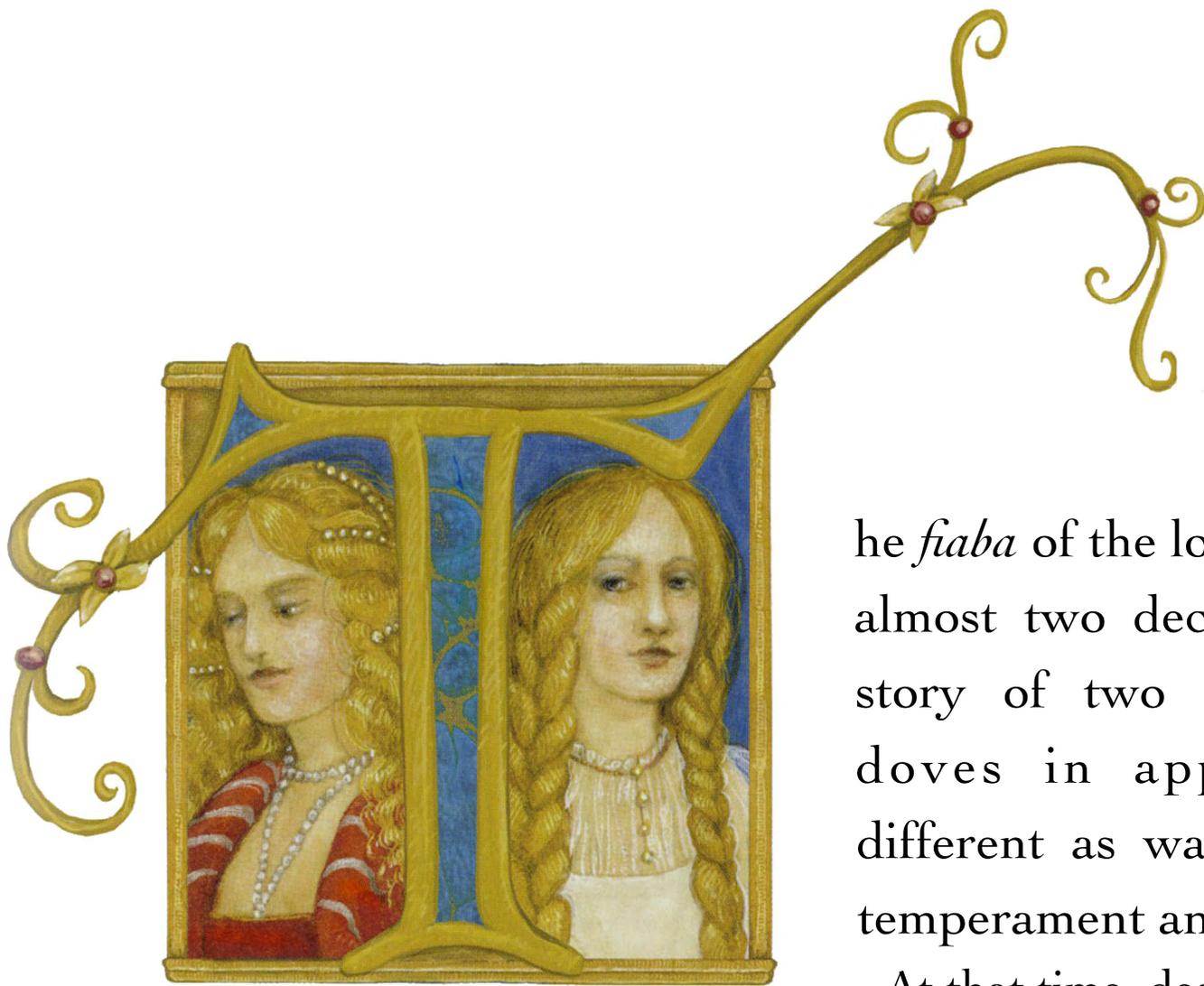
## THE GRACE OF LOVE REVEALS THE PATH.

Beatrice was only nine years old the first time the poet Dante saw her, he slightly older. As they grew into adulthood, he often sought out Beatrice, too stricken by love to do anything beyond stare at her from afar. But one night as he slept, he dreamt of a walled garden surrounded by water. Within this garden, Amor, the fiery god of love, appeared to Dante holding Beatrice wrapped in a red cloak. Inspired by this vision, Dante resolved to spend the remainder of his life honoring his beloved with deeds and poems.

IL SENTIERO VIENE ILLUMINATO



DALLA GRAZIA D'AMORE



he *fiaba* of the lover's path begins almost two decades ago as the story of two sisters, alike as doves in appearance, but different as water and wine in temperament and experience.

At that time, dear Patroness, I was only a girl of sixteen. For as long as I could remember, my sister Tullia and I lived in a palazzo set in Venice, a labyrinth of a city where we heard the sea murmur its music day and night. This palazzo was furnished by my sister through her extraordinary talents and beauty. It glittered with golden mosaics, and was graced with sumptuous paintings and intricate tapestries. Within this palazzo we were aided by servants who felt genuine affection for us. Among them were Caterina, who was Tullia's *ruffiana*—her procuress and confidant—and Caterina's daughter Laura, who was my playmate as well as my maid. And it was there in this palazzo that I bent to my sister's rule, a sapling recognizing the sun's sovereignty.

As I write of Tullia, I will try not to be harsh. I know many have called her a mysterious beauty, cool in the use of her considerable intelligence and allure. In all honesty, my sister was as elusive to me as she was to others. Nonetheless, I hope time has bestowed upon me a measure of wisdom as I remind myself of her unavoidable influence upon me. After all, Tullia was my first vision in this life. My earliest memory is of her bending over to soothe me

as I sobbed the inconsolable tears of childhood, her blonde hair a dazzle of light around a divinity. Unlike most children, my first word was not *madre* or *padre*. It was *sorella*, sister, in honor of Tullia, for our parents had drowned a year after my birth, leaving my sister as the elder of us by fourteen years to raise and provide for me.

Despite her reputation as the most illustrious courtesan in Venice, Tullia shielded my eyes from the carnal nature of love; I saw little that would make a nun blush. But she educated me in other ways. She taught me to read and write in Italian and Latin, a priceless gift bestowed upon few women, for which I am forever grateful. She also tutored me in the art of music, for which I quickly showed love and aptitude. My precocious talents soon won me the affectionate *soprannome*, or nickname, of *la filomela* — the nightingale.

If it was because of my sister that I had an active mind, a voice to sing, food to eat, and a roof over my head, it was also because of my sister I was made to stay inside my home after I turned twelve. Noting that I was of an age where men might approach me because of her profession, Tullia did not allow me to leave the palazzo unless I was dressed plainly and accompanied by an elder servant. These occasions arose less and less frequently as time passed. No matter how much I begged for freedom, Tullia ignored my pleas. She would explain to me in patient tones that my isolation was necessary. It was her hope that, in time, people would see me as a gentlewoman separate from her, rather than as the sister of a courtesan. This was small consolation, for the loneliness that colored my hours felt unending. At sixteen, I was of an age when most young women had already married and borne children, or entered a convent to do God's work. For myself there was nothing — only an abstract promise that might be fulfilled in the future if my sister willed it so.

When I think of this period in my life, I give praise to music. Music helped me survive then, just as it does now, thanks to the generosity of you, my esteemed Patroness.

What else do I remember about my life at that time? Sometimes when I was alone in my room, I would drop a feather from my window into the wind. I'd watch it float away into the sea for as long as it remained visible, imagining



the places it might reach—faraway lands I wished I could visit one day, unnamed countries I could only imagine.

I also recall the brightness of gold ducats and of my sister's hair. The insistent chatter of baby sparrows clustered about my feet as I sang inside the walled garden behind our palazzo. The precious show of sun upon my face. The spicy perfume of oranges from our garden. The briny smell of the sea on warm summer afternoons. The starched linen of my plain brown cloak against my young, tender skin—the cloak that hid me from others' eyes on the increasingly rare occasions when I ventured into the world. Most of all, I remember the confusion of innocence, gratitude, anger, and guilt that infused my emotions toward the sister I loved so deeply yet resented.

Now as I look back, I think Tullia truly wished our *fiaba* of two sisters to remain as it was forever—to divert time like water from its path. But this, of course, was impossible. To preserve my innocence, a courtesan such as my sister would have had to layer restriction upon restriction as if they were blankets upon a winter bed. While she may have thought she was protecting me from the bitter cold, she only made the snow outside my window look all the more enticing.

I began to think of escape.



*In the May* of 1526, I celebrated my sixteenth birthday, still trapped within my home by my sister's will. By then, it had been over three months since I'd last set foot outside our palazzo beyond the walled garden. Shortly after my birthday came La Sensa, the annual celebration marking the marriage of

Venice to the sea. Despite the deadly illness that had taken so many lives earlier that spring, my sister still held her infamous feast. Many considered this unseemly, but Tulla's La Sensa celebration was necessary to solidify her standing and desirability in society. It was for this event that she would compose a poem praising the powers of love and set it to music; I would perform this song to the accompaniment of her lute.

I looked forward to these recitals as a prisoner yearns to glimpse the first anemones of spring from her jail window. I loved the intense study involved in mastering new music as much as I loved the transfixed attention of my sister's guests as I sang for them. While I did not otherwise participate in Tullia's entertainments—she would not allow me, for by morning's wake these celebrations often disintegrated into private ones of a more sensual sort—after I finished singing, I would watch from the back of the musicians' gallery, set high on the wall of the great hall. I was careful not to let the candlelight reveal me as I eagerly spied upon the world forbidden to me.

However, by the spring of my sixteenth year, my joy in music was tempered with steely resolve: I would use my music to free myself from my sister.

Though over two decades have passed since this night, I still remember how I sat inside my chamber the evening of the feast, trying with little success to calm my trilling nerves. Caterina had confided that a great cardinal was coming to La Sensa, one reputed to especially love music. I would perform for him and more than one hundred guests. He would hear me sing. Perhaps I could gain his favor, like so many musicians before me. He could champion my art, bring me to court. I would become a *virtuosa*, a great musician, and make my way in the world.

As I prepared for La Sensa, I felt the weight of the hopes I dared not express to anyone but myself. My maid, Laura, helped me dress. I braided my hair. As I twisted it into a knot upon my neck, a sinuous perfume curled about me. Lilies, roses, vanilla....

“Like two doves are we,” Tullia announced softly, standing behind me as I stared at myself in the mirror. “Both light and serene.”

I exhaled her perfume and looked up. The mirror reflected two golden-haired sisters with grey eyes. One wore a simple gown the color of cream, her braided hair bare of ornaments; the other, red brocade embroidered with silver thread, the full sleeves of her dress slashed with silver ribbon, her curls woven with pearls. I felt as plain as Tullia was beautiful. A sparrow next to a bird of paradise.

“I know you’ll sing your loveliest tonight, my sweet nightingale,” she said. “Though I remain uncertain how wise it is to allow you....”

I couldn’t bear to answer; I feared any protest would invite attention to what I most desired. My heart sped as my sister curved her long neck, so much like mine, to rest her soft cool cheek against my shoulder. Could she guess my thoughts? Apparently not, for she only smiled at our reflections in the mirror.

“Shall we?” she asked after smoothing my hair. “The hour is late.”

Tullia took my hand to lead me to the musicians’ gallery, where I was to remain unseen though not unheard. I followed her, cold with desperation.

Once I was settled in my perch above the great hall, I looked down onto the celebration already underway. I stared at the cardinal, resplendent in his scarlet robes as he held court before my sister’s guests, willing his eyes toward mine. Though the hall was full, there were fewer guests than usual, no doubt because of the sickness that still lingered in Venice; this illness cruelly struck the rich and poor, as well as the young and old, without discrimination. Some wore large-nosed masks of gold and silver, as if they could deceive death by hiding their identities. Others, their faces bared, were less cautious. Dressed in costly silks and velvets, they milled about the large wood and marble table set in the center of the great hall. Gracing the table were some of the voluptuous offerings for which my sister’s celebrations were famed: platters of fowl and fish and bread, with rose petals arranged like a ruddy snowfall around each dish; rare fruits preserved in cordial, nuts glistening in honey, and numerous silver flasks of wine.

Upon my sister’s cue, servants extinguished half the candles, plunging the room into a golden dusk. Everyone fell silent with anticipation.

Tullia rose and greeted her guests with a graceful speech. Then she looked up at me, hidden in the musician's gallery, and nodded.

As she plucked the strings of her lute, my voice soared forth. Though I sang of love, I did not think of love. How little I understood of it then! Instead, I stared toward the cardinal, and tried to remember all my sister had taught: how to sing with a tremble in my throat; to clasp my hands and tilt my head in such a way to mimic rapture. Soon I felt the joy that music brought me, a freedom I could not find any other way in my life at that time.

Yet, as I sang, my gaze locked with the dark eyes of a young man unknown to me. He was seated beside the cardinal, his expression unreadable. Despite the dimness of the room, it seemed as though light clung to him. Although he was not the youngest of the company present that night, he was certainly not past twenty years of age. As I took him in, time seemed to slow and the air turn to water. I had the sense I'd been split into two: one part of me singing, the other examining his form. He was tall and slim, his long limbs still careless with youth. Wavy hair as dark as his eyes reached the shoulder of his deep crimson doublet, framing his wide forehead like a tarnished halo. His face, while not quite what some would consider handsome, expressed an intelligence far more compelling than beauty, and a yearning intensity accompanied by an anger I recognized too well in myself.

I still do not know how I shaped each note with my lips. His sharp gaze burned like salt water on a wound. To escape it, I turned from him, back toward the cardinal upon whom all my hopes were centered.

Once we finished our song, Tullia bowed first to the cardinal, then to the young man. The candles were relit. I retreated into the shadows of the musicians' gallery, just as I always did. But I did not leave.

As the night wore on, I impatiently watched and listened, my sister the focus of the revelry. Music led to poems in praise of her beauty; poetry to dancing. More wine bottles were uncorked. Laughter rose, growing wilder and brighter. Perhaps it was my imagination, but I sensed a desperation in the festivities that mirrored mine as I awaited Tullia's departure.

Once the clock struck eight, my sister's slender red-gowned figure finally left the great hall, followed by her maid, Caterina, and several male admirers desiring a private audience. To my relief, the cardinal was not among them. Though Tullia had retired for the evening to her private chambers, I understood the feast would continue unabated until dawn.

Quickly, I strode downstairs into the hallway where her cloak—the red silk one she always wore outside to mark herself—and my brown linen one hung side by side on their hooks. I draped her red cloak over my cream-colored gown. The cloak was a shade too large, its hood concealing much of my face. This suited my purpose. As long as no one looked too closely, anyone seeing this cloak would think my sister wore it—a childish act, I know, but I was still a child in many ways.

I slipped from the hallway into the great hall, my heart trebling in time against my footsteps. As I crept around the perimeter of the great hall toward the cardinal, I rehearsed my long-awaited plan. I would ask him for patronage, beg him if I must. I whispered beneath my breath the honeyed words I would say. I even batted the lids of my eyes, to encourage the appearance of sincere tears. How naïve I was then, how presumptuous! My dearest Patroness, I did not yet understand that patronage is granted, not petitioned for.

I remained in the shadows, staying far from anyone who might know me. The room reeked with sour wine, the suffocating press of bodies. Surrounded by drunken revelers, I was sure I remained unnoticed as I approached the cardinal.

Fixated by the sight of the cardinal's brilliant red robes, and already mouthing the pretty speech I had readied, I didn't see the lean male figure emerge from behind a column until it was too late.

He stood before me, blocking my way. "Signorina."

As he drew closer, I recognized the young man who had gazed at me while I sang; the one whose eyes had forced me to turn away. Now I saw his stubborn chin was eased by the unexpected fullness of a generous mouth. His

nose was strong but not large—just sharp enough to lend character to a face that otherwise might look too gentle.

I curtly replied, “Signore, allow me to pass.”

The young man shook his head gravely though he smiled. “I have been told that when a gift is given it should immediately be reciprocated with another.”

“I do not think so. Perhaps this is a custom outside of Venice.” I noted the gold ring upon his thumb, the embroidery gilding his red cuff—a wealthy man’s attire. I quickly curtsied to show respect, then rose to approach the cardinal. “I must bid you farewell, good signore.”

He demanded I stop. “I have traveled to many places—Rome, Egypt, even China. I believe it is a custom everywhere to offer a gift for a gift. It would be rude not to honor this tradition.”

“And what gift has been offered?” I asked, turning reluctantly. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched the cardinal rise from his seat, his courtiers bowing before him. I knew I should run to him, to address him before he departed—that my very freedom depended upon it. Yet the young man’s compelling gaze rooted me to where I stood.

“Your song.” He bowed. “For you, signorina.”

Before I could protest, he took my hand, clutched so tightly about the long folds of Tullia’s red cloak, and oh-so-gently coaxed my fingers open. Turning my palm heavenward, he placed a ripe plum almost cobalt of hue, into my hand. The plum looked like a large dark pearl against my palm; I could smell its fragrance, feel its cool, thin skin. My sister’s cloak suddenly felt too warm, its texture too rough against my neck. I could not breathe.

The plum fell from my hand, rolled away into the crowd. I forgot about speaking to the cardinal and my sister’s watchful eye. I felt something I could not name, a force even more powerful than my desire to escape.

I turned and ran, stumbling on the hem of my sister’s cloak. Once I recovered, I rushed from the great hall into the hallway, toward the door that led to the walled garden behind our palazzo. I opened it, my hands trembling, and slipped outside.

Cloaked in the darkness of night, I felt safe, hidden. I inhaled the clean, acidic scent of spring, felt the soft earth beneath my feet. My heart began to slow. The stars were bright, the moon a thin sickle in the deep blue sky. Nearby, church bells struck the ninth hour of the night, their metallic clang softened by the lapping of canal water on the other side of the garden wall.

A brief sliver of light appeared from the palazzo door as it opened, then closed. And the young man stood before me again.

“You shouldn’t have followed me here,” I said. Despite the darkness I could see his eyes. Though they gleamed defiantly, even then I think I detected a sorrow in their fierce depths, as if he had seen much that others could not explain. I wondered what he saw as he looked at me—no doubt a naïve sixteen-year-old girl wearing a red cloak too large for her, bristling with rebellion and uncertainty.

“*Filomela*,” he cried to me, his tone now exuberant. “A princess who turns herself into a nightingale and escapes in the night....”

“That’s an old *fiaba*,” I retorted, injecting a courage I didn’t feel into my voice. “Tell me a story I don’t know.”

“Very well. I will tell you of the lover’s path.”

“Who are you?” I challenged.

He did not answer. Instead, he drew closer and took my hands into his. His touch was warm, welcoming—the caress of one friend to another. Then, without a word of explanation, with our hands joined as one, he spun me around and around in the night garden in a strange, wild dance. Seeing my surprise, he laughed in delight.

As we whirled like children, Tullia’s hood slipped from my face. The cool air kissed my cheeks. My braids came undone, my hair falling loose upon my shoulders. I laughed then too, overcome by an inexplicable giddy joy.

As we danced, I remembered a book I’d read that described a land to the east where streams of fire, colored like the plumes of wild parrots, showered from the sky in a mysterious rain. I forgot the grey stone walls surrounding me. I forgot the sea blocking my escape, and my sister’s relentless shadow. I saw only the stars above, blurring into brilliant streaks of color and light.



*He left me* in the garden as suddenly as he had appeared, slipping back into the hallway. I did not follow him. Instead, I sat alone in the night for some time before I remembered my sister's cloak, and my missed opportunity with the cardinal. When I went to bed that night, I found I could not sleep.

The following day, a masked figure approached my maid, Laura, when she was alone in the piazza. He gave her a carefully wrapped package sealed in green wax, which was addressed to me. Laura gave it to me in the privacy of my room. I immediately swore her to secrecy, begging her not to tell Caterina; I knew her mother would surely inform Tullia.



My heart hammered in anticipation as I broke the seal upon the package to open it.

Within a pale egg of parchment rested a small book, compact enough to be hidden in the fold of a gown. Fragile from age and use, the book's red binding was as rippled as a weather-beaten stone.

When I opened the book, a slender letter slid into my lap.



*To the nightingale who is called Filamena —*

*Here is another gift in exchange for your song last night. This journal belonged to my mother. She gave it to me; now I give it to you. It is my most precious possession, for it has been my main companion during my travels these past three years. It has come with me to distant lands where silent women*

*wear cymbals on their hands; kingdoms where beasts are thought wiser than men. It has witnessed wonders others have only read about in books. Yet though I have crossed many seas with this book by my side, I have yet to visit the geography charted within its pages.*

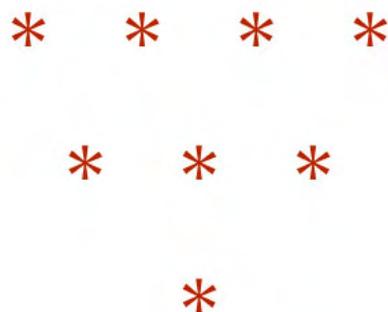
*Within it you will find the story of Dante and Beatrice mapped out, along with tales of other couples. It will show you the way to the lover's path. For to truly love another, you must follow the lover's path wherever it may take you.*



As soon as I saw the writing, I knew whose hand it was. I recognized the fruit of that hand—that same hand that had grasped mine in the garden—as surely as a lover senses their beloved's presence in a darkened room. His writing was not considered, like Tullia's with her carefully chosen flourishes. Instead, his words spilled on the page, as if he'd rushed to capture them with ink before they flew away, like birds startled by lightning. And in his words, I discovered a music different than any I'd heard in my sister's songs.

He also signed his name. Upon learning who he was, I understood so much about him—his anger, his fierceness, his sorrow. His life circumstances were even stranger than mine, for he had been born of power to powerlessness, just as I was born of loss to loneliness.

He was the cardinal's illegitimate son, Angelo.



✱ II ✱



la fortuna  
FORTUNE



### FORTUNE OR FOLLY: CHOOSE YOUR PATH.

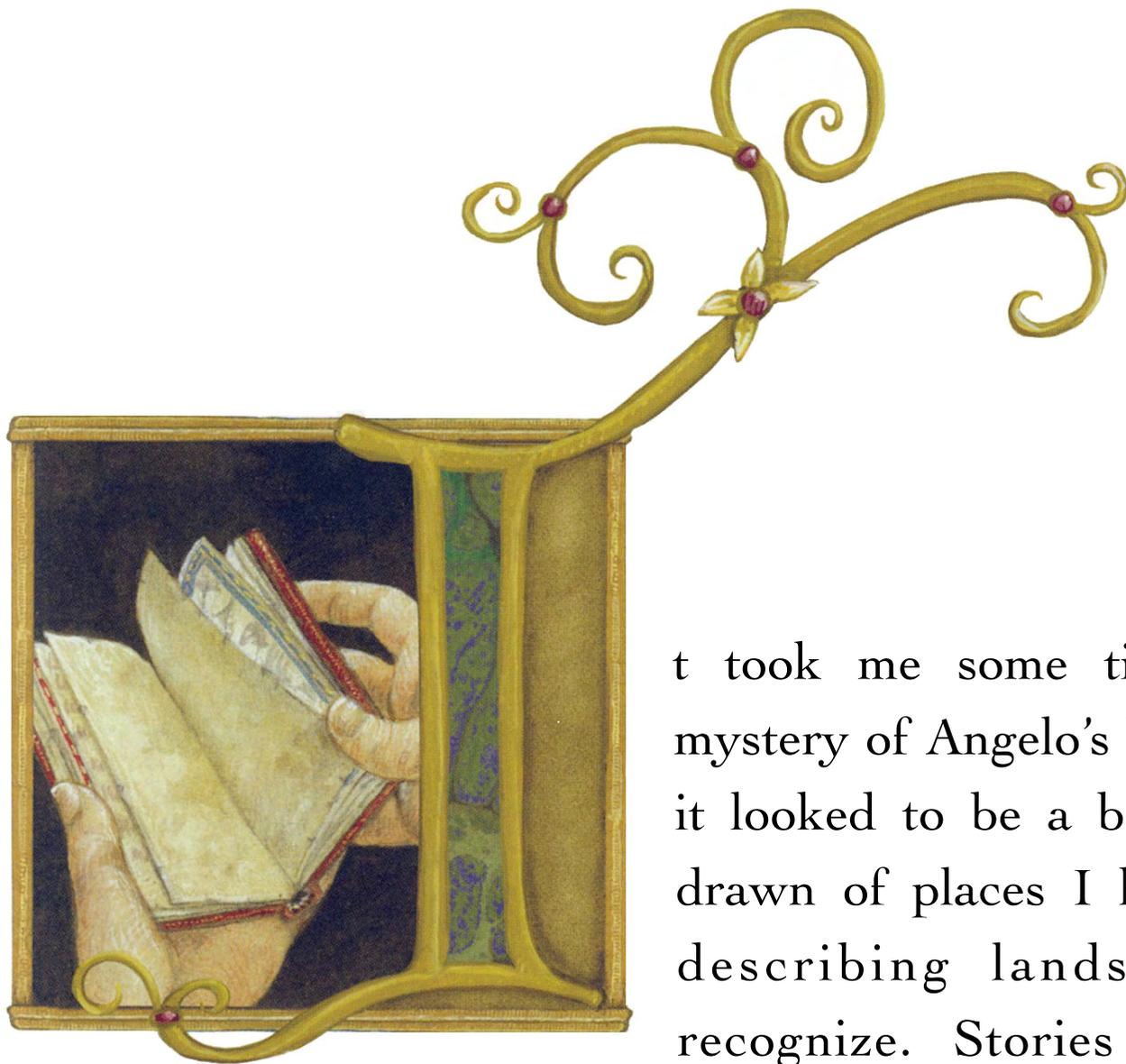
In a faraway land there lived a king with a daughter named Danae—a beautiful princess about whom it was foretold her offspring would murder the king. To escape this fate, the king imprisoned his daughter in a tower set on an island in the middle of the sea, where she would never marry nor have children. But one day, as lonely Danae sang in her prison, a fountain of gold streamed through the tower's only window. Within it appeared Zeus, god of all gods, who loved the princess, and promised her the riches of the world if she would embrace him. Did Danae see the fortune before her, the lover's path? Or did she count her gold coins and think of escape?

LA FORTUNA OR LA FOLLIA



SCELGA IL SUO SENTIERO

COLLEZIONE  
1770 F.



It took me some time to unravel the mystery of Angelo's book. At first glance it looked to be a book of maps—maps drawn of places I had never heard of, describing landscapes I did not recognize. Stories of famous lovers alternated among the maps: Danae and Zeus, Cupid and Psyche. Five words stamped in faded gold along its spine gave the only clue to the book's contents. They read: *For Pilgrims Upon the Path*.

But here I run ahead of my story, my dear Patroness. At that time I told myself it didn't matter what Angelo offered me, or what secret journeys his book might reveal. As soon as I learned his identity, I felt an even greater desire for what his powerful father could offer: a life of my own. The thought of this new life glittered as brightly as the gold ducats my sister accepted for her affections. It blinded my better self, eclipsing any emotions I felt that night in the garden. While I am ashamed to pen these words, I remind myself how young and desperate I was to free myself. Love seemed a luxury too expensive to consider.

Still, my heart felt heavy as I hid Angelo's book and letter under my bed. I sternly reminded myself who his father was, how he could help me. I took out paper and quill. But before I could write Angelo to ask for his assistance in securing the cardinal's favor, Tullia sent for me.

Within my sister's private chambers—rooms that led from the great hall through one richly appointed room after another; rooms that led to the ultimate destination of her bedchamber, where only a few suitors could hope to enter after months of courtship and substantial gifts—Tullia was being painted that day as Venus, the embodiment of love. Though posing was time-consuming and tedious, my sister always made an effort to encourage the attentions of artists. She knew their adoration and tributes could only serve to heighten her fame, thus increasing her fortune. It was my duty to keep her company during the long hours, to entertain her with conversation and song. But this, too, would soon end; I'd overheard Tullia tell Caterina that I had grown too old for such tasks. As I approached my sister's chambers, I fretted whether she'd noticed I'd taken her cloak. Had Tullia called to scold me?

Taking a moment to ease my nerves, I stood silently in the doorway, watching. What I viewed reassured.

Tullia lay on a pallet draped in her red cloak—the same one I'd borrowed for my unsuccessful attempt to approach the cardinal—with her cat Dolce curled at her feet. If my sister was upset with me, she displayed no sign of it. She smiled serenely while Caterina placed a wreath of crimson roses upon her brow, just as it looked in the painting already underway. Even in its unfinished state, the painting was done so skillfully that to gaze upon it was to luxuriate in the weight of the silk touching my sister's shoulder, the luminescence of her grey eyes. However, I took no pleasure in its art. It only reminded me of all my sister had sacrificed to provide for us.



The artist adjusted a rose close to Tullia's ear, breaking off a thorn. He poured a sepia-hued powder into an oil the color of amber, and chose a brush.

To my surprise, Tullia was speaking to someone I could not see. Someone who was not the artist. This surprised me: these days she only requested my presence when she was alone with the artist. I grew warm with nerves.

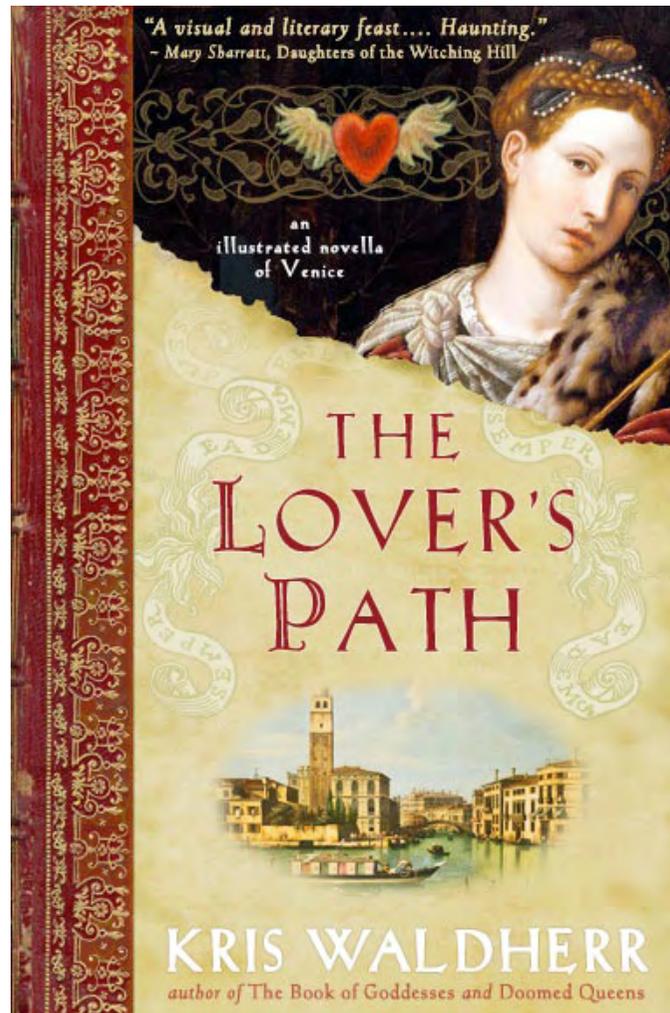
“Forgive my informality,” she said, her voice laced with inviting indulgence. “I promised to pose, and I would not break my word, even for your esteemed company. I can converse with you as long as I do not move too much.” Her eyes lit on me at last. “There you are, my sister! I have a special guest today, who comes with news from our good friends in Rome.”

As soon as I entered the room, I saw a young man, dark-haired and expensively dressed, seated beside my sister just beyond the artist’s view. In the brilliance of day, it took me a moment to recognize Angelo. This time he was clothed in somber hues, unlike the scarlet doublet he’d donned at La Senza. A small smile of either amusement or disdain—I could not tell which—played on his lips as he took in the tableau of my sister’s pose.

Tullia widened her eyes to greet me, then flicked a finger toward a chair across the room, far from the reach of Angelo’s eyes. I understood this was her way to avoid drawing notice to me. Yet why had she called me to her at such a time? Had she overheard us in the garden after all?



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