



## A Marriage of Convenience

*Europe grew out of the Dark Ages partly because some sense of order returned to the continent. People could live in peace for longer periods of time. Safe from attack, farmers were able to produce more food. The more food they produced, the more they had left over for use in trade. Some peasants moved to towns where they learned skills. These skilled workmen organized themselves into guilds that protected their interests and could undertake big projects such as building cathedrals.*

*Towns with many skilled workers grew wealthy and people looked for ways to protect their money. Soon, it was not enough just to keep money safe. People began using their money to make more money. Some of the princely families and merchants became wealthier than the kings they served. The kings, then, started borrowing money from these bankers.*

Florence, Italy, became wealthy early because of its wool workers. They had invented a way to make cloth that no one else knew. In this growing town, a family named Medici (MED-uh-chee) became bankers. For several generations, very clever, careful men headed the family. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Medici family was very rich and powerful.

The Medici had several branch banks in major European cities. Family bankers lent money not only to businessmen, but also to kings they favored. The Medici were not only money-makers and politicians, they were also talented men and women who appreciated the talents of others. They supported young, penniless artists and collected the finest works for their palaces. Some of the most famous works of Renaissance art were paid for with Medici money.

In addition, the Medici loved learning. They set up the first public library in Europe. They gathered together scholars and founded universities. The Medici, and a few other rich Italian families, helped scholars satisfy a curiosity about the ancient world. This curiosity helped scholars satisfy a curiosity about the ancient world. This curiosity helped to kindle the Renaissance.

But even the Medici had problems.

In the spring of 1467, Lucrezia (Lu-CREE-shuh) de Medici left Florence to travel to Rome. She was supposed to be making a family visit to her brother, a banker there. Actually, she was looking for a wife for her eldest son, Lorenzo; she had a girl in mind: Clarice Orsini (or-SEE-nee).

It was easy for a Medici to manage to meet an Orsini. Lucrezia soon wrote her husband that Clarice was attractive and healthy; (good health was an important point at a time when most people died before they had reached the age of 40!) however, the girl was not very well educated. She was "not," Lucrezia wrote, "to be compared with" her own three girls.

But would Clarice's family accept Lorenzo? The Orsini were a very old and respected family that had existed since the time of ancient Rome. Compared to the Orsini, the Medici were nobodies: upstarts and mere merchants and they had no title. They had no great family lands, for all their properties had been bought. They did have money, but money did not always bring respect.

While the Orsini thought over the proposal, Lucrezia went back to Florence. There, she may have had second thoughts about bringing an arrogant Orsini into the family. One of the reasons the Medici were successful was their modesty. The people of Florence were independent and proud, whereas the Medici had been tactful enough never to claim to be rulers.

Young Lorenzo de Medici had an especially open and friendly personality. His friendliness made up, in part, for his lack of good looks. He had a broad, flat nose which he may have broken in his youth. Because of this, it was said, he had no sense of smell and his voice was unpleasant. He was, however, tall, well-built, athletic and very talented.

When only 17, Lorenzo saved his father's life. While riding ahead of his father on a road outside of Florence, Lorenzo had discovered some armed men waiting in ambush. Thinking-fast Lorenzo secretly sent back word to his father. Then, he distracted the armed men until his father was safely away on another road.

The would-be murderers were caught. Piero de Medici (the father) was urged to put them to death immediately; however, Piero spared their lives and even made a friend of the leader of the plot. Lorenzo observed this thoughtfully: "He only knows how to conquer who knows how to forgive."

Lorenzo was destined to become head of the Medici family. He had been well prepared for high positions. He had a princely income, great ability, a winning personality, and a love of the arts and learning. He was a prince in everything, but name. Was that good enough for a proud Orsini?

The answer, it turned out, was yes. The Orsini accepted Lorenzo. Lucrezia de Medici overcame her own doubts and decided on Clarice. Two years later, on June 4, 1469, Clarice and Lorenzo were married. The celebration went on for three days with a long round of expensive banquets and dances.

Was the match a happy one? Historians can't say for certain. Actually, the question probably wasn't all that important, anyway – at least, not to Lorenzo de Medici. He didn't marry for happiness; he had married for family position. In that, he had succeeded. The marriage made the Medici one of Italy's princely families. A sign of this came in the next generation. One of Lorenzo's sons became Pope Leo the 10<sup>th</sup>.



*Lorenzo was called the "magnificent" for the way in which he fulfilled the promise of his youth. He discovered the artist, Michelangelo. He recognized the genius of Leonardo da Vinci and furthered his career and he founded the University of Pisa for the study of Latin.*

## A Marriage of Convenience

Instructions: Read the handout titled,  
“A Marriage of Convenience”

Complete the following assignment:

1. Was the marriage between Lorenzo and Clarice a good idea? Why?
2. How would you react to your parents if they forced you into a marriage with someone you didn't know? Explain.
3. If your friend was in Clarice's situation, what advice would you give to him/her?
4. Explain what the following quote means: “He only knows how to conquer, who knows how to forgive.” What is its importance in the article?
5. Write a letter to Mr. Orsini. Even though the wedding did happen, Mr. Orsini has doubts about the family's choice of husband for his daughter. Explain to Mr Orsini, in a letter, why the Medici family is a good family to marry into.