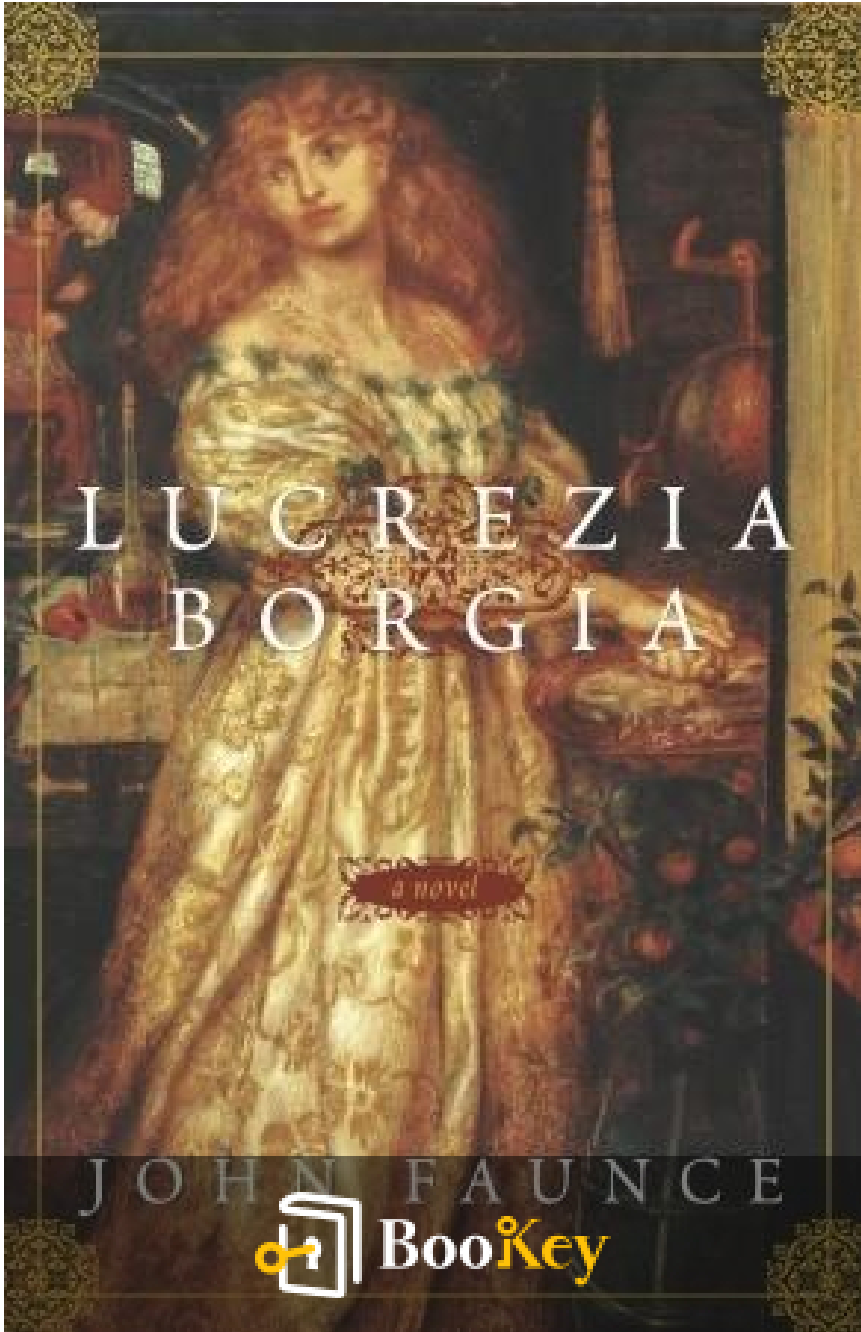


# Lucrezia Borgia PDF (Limited Copy)

Sarah Bradford



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# Lucrezia Borgia Summary

Unveiling the Complex Legacy of Lucrezia Borgia

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## About the book

In her captivating biography, Sarah Bradford delves into the intricate life of Lucrezia Borgia, a prominent figure of the Renaissance often overshadowed by dark legends of her family's notorious reputation. The Borgia family, including Lucrezia's father, Pope Alexander VI, and her brother, Cesare Borgia, were infamous for their ruthless ambition, political machinations, and scandalous behaviors. However, Bradford presents Lucrezia not merely as a victim of her family's ambitions or a sinister character involved in incest and murder, but as a complex and resourceful woman.

Lucrezia's life exemplified the challenges and expectations placed upon women in her time. She skillfully navigated a treacherous political landscape, using her intelligence and beauty to forge powerful alliances and maintain her own agency amidst a world dominated by male rivals. Drawing from a rich array of contemporary documents and firsthand accounts, Bradford illustrates the vibrant social and cultural milieu of Renaissance Italy, highlighting how Lucrezia's role in political intrigues was integral to the era's historical landscape.

As the narrative unfolds, readers gain insight into Lucrezia's marriages, most notably to Giovanni Sforza and later to Alfonso of Aragon, which were strategic moves intended to strengthen her family's political power. Each union came with its own challenges, including betrayal and family conflicts,

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revealing Lucrezia's resilience and her ability to adapt to the whims of her world. Through Bradford's lens, Lucrezia Borgia emerges not only as a central figure in her own right but as a symbol of both the opportunities and constraints faced by women during the Renaissance. The biography encourages readers to reconsider the myths surrounding her legacy, offering a nuanced portrayal of a woman whose life was as rich and multifaceted as the era in which she lived.

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## About the author

**\*\*Summary of Chapters:\*\***

In these chapters, the narrative unfolds around the life and works of Sarah Bradford, a prominent historian and biographer whose scholarly contributions are distinguished by her unique background. Educated at St. Mary's Convent in Shaftesbury and later at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, Bradford's academic journey was marked by her exceptional grasp of history, which earned her a prestigious scholarship. Her extensive travels through regions such as the West Indies, Portugal, and Italy enriched her cultural understanding and provided a broader context for her historical analyses.

Bradford's fluency in four languages significantly enhances her research capabilities, allowing her to delve deeper into the texts and sources necessary for her diverse body of work. Notably, she made history herself within literary circles as the first female author of *\*The Englishman's Wine: The Story of Port\**, which reflects her pioneering spirit in a male-dominated field. This accomplishment reflects her commitment not only to contribute scholarly works but also to pave the way for future female historians and writers.

Her experiences in the Manuscript Department at Christie's London play a

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critical role in her development as a historian. Here, she appraised manuscripts spanning from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, fostering a deep appreciation for primary sources which would later influence her writing on notable historical figures. This particular expertise culminated in her work on *\*Cesare Borgia\**, which served as a foundation for the BBC series *\*The Borgias\**. Bradford also expanded upon this narrative through her own novelization, showcasing her ability to translate historical narratives into engaging stories for contemporary audiences.

Most recently, Bradford has turned her attention to Lucrezia Borgia, a figure often obscured by her family's notorious reputation. In this work, she seeks to humanize Lucrezia and explore her life beyond the scandal, reflecting a broader aim of Bradford's writing: to recover and reinterpret the stories of women in history who have been unfairly portrayed or forgotten. Through these chapters, readers witness how Bradford's life experiences and scholarly pursuits converge, shaping her as a vital voice in the historical discourse surrounding often-misunderstood figures of the past.

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# Chapter 1 Summary: 1. The Pope's Daughter

## Summary of "The Pope's Daughter"

The tale centers around Lucrezia Borgia, renowned for her grace and beauty, described by Niccolò Cagnolo as a young woman of middle height with a charming smile, golden hair, and a long, well-cut face. As the illegitimate daughter of Rodrigo Borgia, who ascended to the papacy as Pope Alexander VI in 1492, Lucrezia's life unfolds against a backdrop of political intrigue and social upheaval in Renaissance Rome.

At this time, Rome was evolving into a center of classical culture and power, recovering from the Great Schism, and asserting its dominance over both European territories and the burgeoning New World. Rodrigo Borgia's rise to power began in Valencia in 1431 and was marked by astute political maneuvering and strategic alliances that fortified his position within the Vatican. His tenure as pope was laden with extravagance and controversy, engendering both admiration and hostility among the populace.

Rodrigo's personal life was as tumultuous as his political career; he fathered several children, primarily with his mistress, Vannozza Cattanei. Lucrezia, born on April 18, 1480, was nurtured under her father's shadow, primarily raised by her cousin Adriana de Mila. Adriana's guidance prepared Lucrezia

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for a significant societal role amidst the patriarchal constraints of the time.

Family dynamics were complex within the Borgia household. Lucrezia maintained intricate relationships with her brothers, Cesare and Juan, characterized by nepotism and scandalous rumors of incest, which drew public scrutiny. The influence of Cesare, known for his ambition and ruthlessness, overshadowed Lucrezia, illustrating the celebrated yet dangerous attributes of Renaissance masculinity. His fierce aspirations often overshadowed Lucrezia's circumstances, as discussions arose surrounding power and gender roles.

In an environment where male dominance was pervasive, Lucrezia's upbringing was marked by her father's ambitions. Despite being well-educated in literature and languages—typical of noblewomen of her stature—she had to navigate the limits imposed upon women in her society, representing a striking contradiction between her education and the expectations placed upon her.

Rodrigo frequently leveraged Lucrezia's potential marriages as political tools to strengthen the Borgia dynasty, skillfully manipulating alliances to adapt to shifting power dynamics. Each union on her behalf not only illuminated the political machinations of the era but also subjected Lucrezia to the whims of her father's grand designs, revealing the harsh realities underlying her life's trajectory. As the story of Lucrezia unfolds, her experiences

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become emblematic of the intricate interplay between gender, power, and familial loyalty during one of history's most fascinating epochs.

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## Chapter 2 Summary: 2. Countess of Pesaro

### Chapter 2 Summary: Lucrezia Borgia

The chapter delves into the intricate dynamics surrounding Lucrezia Borgia's marriage, set against the backdrop of early 16th-century Italy, a period characterized by political intrigue and shifting allegiances.

#### The Context of Lucrezia's Marriage

Pope Alexander VI, who had recently become pope amidst suspicions of simony—buying votes for his election—viewed the marriage of his daughter Lucrezia to Giovanni Sforza not merely as a familial union but as a strategic alliance. Cardinal Ascanio Sforza recognized that this union would help solidify the Borgias' power and loyalty within the turbulent political landscape of the era, particularly as Alexander sought to strengthen ties with influential families.

#### Lucrezia's Betrothal and Political Maneuvering

On February 2, 1493, Lucrezia was betrothed to Giovanni Sforza in a calculated response to rising tensions with King Ferrante of Naples. This marriage was a tactical maneuver, intended to bolster alliances and deter

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adversaries, showcasing Pope Alexander's ruthless political tactics even as Lucrezia remained a mere child.

### **Giovanni Sforza: A Minor Nobility**

Giovanni Sforza, the illegitimate son of a minor noble, was coerced into the marriage by his influential relatives. While eligible, his limited authority compared to other members of the Sforza clan meant his union with Lucrezia carried significant political implications, despite being shrouded in secrecy due to prior betrothals.

### **The Marriage Ceremony**

The lavish wedding on June 12, 1493, took place at the Vatican, symbolizing the grand ambitions of the Borgia family. However, this opulent display was not just a celebration; it was a calculated event meant to fortify future political gain amidst apprehensions about the legitimacy and ramifications of the marriage.

### **Political Fallout and Shifting Allegiances**

In the aftermath of the wedding, Pope Alexander sought to strengthen his ties with Spain amidst mounting rivalries. The political dynamics began to shift dramatically, unraveling the security that the marriage was meant to

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provide, leaving the Borgias increasingly vulnerable to challenges.

## **Marital Strains and External Threats**

With looming invasions, the complexity of Alexander's personal life deepened, particularly with the presence of Giulia Farnese, who had moved to Naples to bolster her own power amid evolving conflicts. Her role exacerbated tensions within Rome, signaling the personal complications interwoven with political strategies.

## **A Broader Political Landscape**

The chapter underscores the volatile nature of alliances during the Renaissance, with Alexander VI navigating fluctuating loyalties while promising advantageous futures for his children. The looming threats from rival families, particularly the powerful Orsini, and external forces, primarily France, further complicated the landscape.

## **Lucrezia's Life in Pesaro**

Amidst the intrigues that swirled around her, Lucrezia experienced moments of relative security while residing in Pesaro. Yet, her privileged position as the pope's daughter was increasingly overshadowed by the tumultuous political environment in Rome, highlighting the duality of her existence.

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## Conclusion

Overall, this chapter illustrates the deep interconnection between personal relationships and political maneuvers during the Renaissance. Lucrezia's marriage emerges as a critical element in the Borgia legacy, simultaneously influencing and reflecting the unstable socio-political climate of Italy at the time.

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# Chapter 3 Summary: 3. The Borgias Renascent

## The Borgias Renascent: A Summary of Power Shifts and Family Dynamics

### Introduction to Change in Power Dynamics

By late spring 1495, the Borgia family experienced a significant transformation in their fortunes, primarily due to Pope Alexander VI's diplomatic prowess in countering King Charles of France. Charles, having been outmaneuvered during his campaign in Italy, returned home furious after Cesare Borgia was taken hostage, reflecting the fragility of his control in the region.

### Formation of the Holy League

On March 31, 1495, a crucial alliance known as the Holy League was formed, uniting key powers such as Milan, Venice, Spain, the papacy, and the Holy Roman Emperor against Charles. This coalition highlighted the increasing resistance to French dominance in Italy, which foreshadowed further conflicts.

### Charles's Decline in Naples

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Charles's reputation deteriorated in Naples due to unflattering behavior, sparking resentment among the populace. His retreat in May was accompanied by soldiers departing with plunder, including a new and devastating disease—syphilis—which would have long-lasting consequences throughout Europe.

## **Borgia Returns to Rome**

With the French retreat, the Borgia family reveled in their newfound stability and power in Rome, showcasing their wealth and Spanish heritage through lavish decorations of the Borgia Apartments in the Vatican, signaling their aspirations to assert dominance in Italian politics.

## **Lucrezia's Relationship with Giovanni Sforza**

Lucrezia Borgia's strained marriage to Giovanni Sforza came under scrutiny as his claims of intimacy were undermined by growing mistrust. Political pressures mounted, leading Giovanni to face discussions of divorce, emphasizing the complexities of marital alliances in the ruthless political landscape of the time.

## **Giovanni's Desperate Measures**

Amid increasing paranoia regarding betrayals from the Borgias, Giovanni

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fled to Pesaro without confiding in allies, a hasty move that illustrated the unraveling of his marriage and the precarious position he held amidst the shifting power dynamics.

## **Borgia Family Reunions**

The summer of 1496 marked a time of family reunions, filled with spectacle but also underlying tensions, particularly between Lucrezia and her sister-in-law Sancia. Their rivalry was not only personal, based on beauty, but also political, as they jostled for influence within the family hierarchy.

## **Enter Juan Gandia**

The arrival of Juan Gandia was seen as a promising development for the Borgias, with Pope Alexander hoping he would neutralize the Orsini threat. However, Alexander's decision to appoint Juan as a military leader backfired, culminating in a disastrous campaign against the Orsini that exposed the vulnerabilities within Borgia defenses.

## **Tragic Death and Its Aftermath**

Juan Gandia's shocking murder sent reverberations throughout Rome, igniting suspicions and hostilities—particularly towards the Orsini family, whom the Borgias had already clashed with. Pope Alexander's public

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mourning for his son heightened tensions, reinforcing the perilous nature of Borgia politics.

### **Political Maneuvering Post-Tragedy**

In his grief, Pope Alexander prioritized securing Lucrezia's divorce from Giovanni Sforza, setting the stage for a politically advantageous second marriage. This plan illustrated the Borgia family's strategic approach to consolidating power through marital alliances.

### **Divorce Proceedings**

The divorce was eventually finalized, hinging on allegations of non-consummation, amidst complex negotiations involving various political figures. Giovanni's reluctance to comply underscored the pressures exerted by the Borgias, revealing the intricate interplay of personal and political interests.

### **Conclusion and Future Aspirations**

Lucrezia's divorce, formally concluded in December 1497, represented a pivotal moment for the Borgia family, allowing her to pursue a second marriage that aligned more closely with their ambitions. Despite enduring obstacles, the Borgias remained steadfast in their quest for power and

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influence through strategic dynastic marriages, setting the stage for their future aspirations and the continued drama of Italian politics.

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# Chapter 4: 4. The Tragic Duchess of Bisceglie

## Chapter 4: The Tragic Duchess of Bisceglie

This chapter delves into the life of Lucrezia Borgia, a figure shrouded in both political significance and scandal during the Renaissance. Born into the powerful Borgia family, her father, Pope Alexander VI, appointed her as the governor of Spoleto and Foligno, a position that, while prestigious, was overshadowed by her tainted reputation stemming from rumors and turbulent alliances.

Lucrezia's first marriage to Giovanni Sforza was fraught with scandal, particularly accusations of its consummation and questions regarding her virtue. Following their divorce, she became embroiled in more controversies, including the enigmatic death of Pedro Calderon, known as Perotto, who was rumored to have an affair with her. These incidents highlighted her father's manipulation of her relationships to bolster his political aspirations.

As negotiations for Lucrezia's second marriage to Alfonso, the illegitimate son of the Duke of Calabria, began, it became increasingly clear that her life was dictated by the ambitions of her family rather than her personal desires. Their wedding, held in July with great spectacle, served as a strategic



maneuver to enhance Cesare Borgia's influence, underscoring Lucrezia's role as a pawn in the complex chess game of power politics.

Despite her elevated title, Lucrezia was often caught between her brother Cesare's growing ambitions and Alfonso's political ties to the Aragonese faction. As Cesare's hunger for dominance escalated, he increasingly perceived Alfonso as a rival, culminating in an assassination attempt that ultimately led to Alfonso's murder, orchestrated by Cesare himself. This fratricidal act underscored the brutal dynamics within the Borgia family, revealing the depths of the conflict fueling their quest for power.

In the wake of Alfonso's death, Lucrezia's profound grief brought to light her emotional depth amidst the ruthless maneuvering of her family. Her mourning was cloaked in secrecy, reflecting both her personal suffering and her diminished agency within the Borgia household's machinations.

Following Cesare's return from France and his subsequent military triumphs, a climate of fear gripped Rome, as the Borgias' ruthless tactics transformed them into figures that evoked both fascination and horror among the Italian aristocracy. This atmosphere of intimidation hinted at the potential for further consolidation of their power, fostering a sense of ongoing uncertainty regarding their reign.

Ultimately, Lucrezia's story encapsulates the tragic amalgamation of

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personal tragedy and political ambition, illustrating her struggles for a sense of agency and genuine affection against a backdrop dominated by violence, betrayal, and the relentless pursuit of power.

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## Chapter 5 Summary: 5. Turning Point

### ### Turning Point

In February 1501, Duke Ercole I d'Este of Ferrara firmly declared his opposition to marrying his son, Don Alfonso, to Lucretia Borgia, following her exile to Nepi. Lucrezia, mourning the death of her husband Alfonso Bisceglie, wrote letters revealing her sorrow but later transitioned from despair to a more pragmatic outlook. She began asserting her own agency, ordering necessary items for herself and her son, Rodrigo, while alluding to the intrigues brewing within the Vatican, which palpably influenced her future.

### ### Lucrezia's New Alliances

As Lucrezia navigated her newfound independence, she initiated secret communications with Caterina Gonzaga, a trusted ally. Their coded messages reflected the necessity for discretion and highlighted Lucrezia's tactical thinking as she maneuvered through her changed circumstances. Amidst her ambitions to redefine her position away from the control of her powerful family, discussions surrounding her potential marriage to Don Alfonso d'Este heightened. Lucrezia was determined to assert her influence in the politically charged atmosphere of Renaissance Italy.

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### ### Marriage Negotiations

Negotiations for Lucrezia's marriage intensified due to mounting rumors about a union with the esteemed D'Este family, known for their noble lineage and political clout. However, Duke Ercole d'Este hesitated, weighed down by Lucrezia's controversial history, including an illegitimate child and various scandals that tarnished her name. He favored forging French alliances for his son, aiming to elevate the family's status.

Despite initial resistance, Ercole ultimately yielded to the pressures from both Pope Alexander VI and King Louis XII of France, who were eager to strengthen ties by marrying Lucrezia into the D'Este family. His agreement to the marriage was a calculated move to avoid offending the Pope, acknowledging the powerful political ramifications that could come from the union.

### ### The Wedding

The marriage contract was formally finalized on August 26, 1501, with the wedding ceremony taking place shortly after on September 1. This union between Lucrezia and Alfonso d'Este signified a pivotal moment in her life, as she transitioned from a mere pawn in her family's political games to an active player shaping her own destiny.

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Despite initial reservations, the D'Este dynasty embraced the marriage, using it as a strategic decision to fortify their political standing against the influential Cesare Borgia and to establish favorable diplomatic relations with France. In the wake of her marriage, Lucrezia began to assert herself more confidently, indicating a newfound strength and autonomy within the complicated landscape of Renaissance politics, marking the beginning of a transformative chapter in her life.

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# Chapter 6 Summary: 6. Farewell to Rome

## Chapter 6: Farewell to Rome

### Introduction

On January 6, 1502, Lucrezia Borgia embarked on a new chapter in her life as she left Rome for Ferrara, following the public celebration of her marriage. This pivotal moment was laden with emotion, particularly during her heartfelt goodbye to her father, Pope Alexander VI.

### The Wedding and Celebrations

Lucrezia's marriage, publicly announced on September 4, 1501, was met with vibrant celebrations, including cannon fire and a grand procession. Adorned in a luxurious golden brocade dress, she celebrated alongside a hefty entourage. Her father, the Pope, orchestrated the festivities, reveling in his daughter's new union within the politically powerful Este family.

### Lucrezia's Health and Feelings

Amid the lavish festivities, Lucrezia battled fatigue, overwhelmed by the incessant round of social obligations. While outwardly participating in the

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joyous celebrations, she inwardly felt confined in an emotional prison, yearning for freedom as she anticipated her departure to Ferrara.

### **Concerns About the Future**

Anxiety clouded Lucrezia's future with the Este family. She understood the precariousness of her position, realizing her marriage's stability rested on her father's and brother's political clout. Leaving her son, Rodrigo, in Rome intensified her emotional strain, as she grappled with the personal sacrifices intertwined with her new role.

### **Negotiations and Diplomatic Maneuvering**

Throughout the preceding months, Lucrezia played a pivotal role in the intricate negotiations surrounding her marriage and dowry. Her ability to mediate between her father and the Este family showcased her emerging political acumen, as she adeptly navigated the complexities of alliances and expectations.

### **Rich Gifts and Preparations for Ferrara**

As the wedding day approached, both the Borgia and Este families displayed their wealth through extravagant gifts and preparations. Lucrezia's extensive trousseau, filled with opulent items, symbolized her intention to impress her

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new family and assert her status in her new life.

## **Cultural and Social Life**

Lucrezia's final days in Rome were bustling with elaborate celebrations, including grand balls and carnivals. These events not only illustrated the Borgia family's affluence but also hinted at the underlying tensions stemming from their political maneuvers.

## **Final Farewell**

On the day of her departure, a poignant farewell unfolded between Lucrezia and her father. As she donned her splendid attire and left the palace, the Pope watched from a window, his demeanor reflecting deep love and concern for her well-being in the trials that lay ahead.

## **Conclusion**

Lucrezia's farewell marked a significant transition, embodying a complex interplay of personal emotion and the intricate political landscape of the Renaissance. As she departed from Rome, she faced a future in Ferrara filled with both promise and uncertainty, with the echoes of her past resonating in her heart.

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# Chapter 7 Summary: 7. The Road to Ferrara

## ### Chapter 7: The Road to Ferrara

### #### Journey to Ferrara

Lucrezia Borgia embarked on a formidable journey to Ferrara, accompanied by a substantial entourage that included her friends, family, and numerous servants. Utilizing various means of transport such as a mule, a graceful white jennet, and a comfortable litter provided by her father, Lucrezia traversed the landscape with a procession that featured ladies of her court, bishops, and members of her household. This grand caravan, characterized by its multitude of carriages and mules, reflected her noble status and the conventions of her time.

### #### Accompaniment and Anticipation

While Lucrezia's brother Cesare significantly influenced her life choices, particularly through the presence of his rumored lover, Drusilla, her primary companion on this journey was Cardinal Cosenza. The entourage also included notable figures from Ferrara, such as envoys and noblemen aligned with the Este family. These interactions were vital for establishing the political ties and social connections necessary for Lucrezia's future role in Ferrara.

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#### #### Lucrezia's Reception

The journey was arduous, yet Lucrezia was greeted with warmth and celebrations in each town she passed, including Foligno, where elaborate displays honored her presence. This reception underscored her esteemed position in Italy, indicating the high regard in which she was held despite her mixed emotions about the attention.

#### #### Emotional Undertones

Amid the ostentatious celebrations, Lucrezia often felt reserved, seeking solitude during the social festivities. The pressure of constant scrutiny weighed heavily on her, especially as she traversed her brother's former territories, serving as a constant reminder of the influence her family wielded in these regions.

#### #### Navigating Relations

Lucrezia's interactions with her future in-laws, particularly Ercole d'Este, her father-in-law, unveiled the underlying tensions of her lineage and the complex political dynamics of the time. Marriages among noble families were often strategic alliances and reflected broader ambitions, highlighting the intricate dance of power that defined her world.

#### #### Cultural Expectations

The chapter delves into the societal norms of the Renaissance period, especially regarding beauty and decorum for noblewomen. Lucrezia's



meticulous attention to her appearance and behavior illustrated the considerable expectations placed on women of her status, emphasizing the importance of aesthetics and propriety in their lives.

#### #### Arrival in Ferrara

Lucrezia's long-awaited arrival in Ferrara marked a pivotal moment in her life. The city, known for its wealth and grandeur, epitomized the power of the Este family, signifying not just a new home but also the intricate political maneuvering that characterized her existence as a Borgia.

#### #### Conclusion

This chapter encapsulates Lucrezia's physical and emotional journey to Ferrara, showcasing her complex relationships, the societal pressures she faced, and the rich tapestry of Renaissance life influencing her role. The grand entry into Ferrara heralded a new chapter for Lucrezia, filled with opportunities for prestige but also overshadowed by the weight of her family's legacy and the intricate politics of her time.



## Chapter 8: 8.A New Life

### Chapter 8: A New Life

Lucrezia Borgia's arrival in Ferrara on February 2, 1502, marked a significant transition in her life. Chronicler Bernardino Zambotti praised the city for its beauty and vibrant atmosphere, which stood in contrast to the more tumultuous backdrop of Rome. As she entered Ferrara amidst a grand celebration, she was mounted on a decorated horse, accompanied by Alfonso d'Este's courtiers and an ambassador from France, underscoring the importance of her marriage to Alfonso, the Duke of Ferrara.

The wedding procession featured a dazzling display of Alfonso's mounted troops, musicians, and prominent guests, all adding to the festive spirit. Lucrezia wore opulent garments adorned with jewels, and her extensive trousseau was valued at over 200,000 ducats, symbolizing the political and economic stakes of the marriage. However, her triumphant entry was somewhat marred by an embarrassing fall from her horse, which she handled with grace and laughter, showcasing her charm.

Once settled in Ferrara, Lucrezia faced the challenge of navigating her relationship with her sister-in-law, Isabella d'Este. Isabella, wary of losing her status and influence, perceived Lucrezia as a rival, leading to unflattering



comments about her social conduct after the wedding. Despite Lucrezia's efforts to win Isabella over with her tact and charm, lingering familial tensions and the weight of their shared mother's legacy complicated her integration into the court.

As festivities continued, Lucrezia's health began to decline. Speculation arose around a potential pregnancy, prompting her to maintain a social presence at court even as her condition worsened. By July, she became gravely ill and suffered a stillbirth, a devastating event that placed additional pressure on her, particularly concerning her family's expectations of producing heirs for the Este line.

Amidst her personal struggles, Lucrezia contended with the broader political dynamics tied to her brother, Cesare Borgia. His aggressive maneuvers reverberated throughout Italy, further complicating her social standing and sense of security. Despite these adversities, Lucrezia's role was crucial in providing stability for the Este family during this period of turmoil. As the year concluded, her situation remained fraught with anxiety, yet her contributions continued to solidify her place within the court, and her allowance was accordingly secured.

This chapter highlights Lucrezia's complex adaptation to life in Ferrara, encapsulating themes of resilience, the intricacies of familial alliances, and the interplay between personal and political challenges in a pivotal moment

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of Italian history.

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## Chapter 9 Summary: 9. The Heavens Conspire

### ### Chapter 9: The Heavens Conspire

In August 1503, Lucrezia Borgia finds herself enveloped in grief following the death of her father, Pope Alexander VI. However, she swiftly steps back into her role as "la duchessa" in Ferrara, embracing her renewed health and engaging in the vibrant social life of the court alongside her ladies, Angela Borgia, Nicola, and Elisabetta. This return to courtly obligations allows her to experience the complexities and rivalries of noble life.

Lucrezia becomes a focal point of interest at the Ferrara court, but her enjoyment is marred by the presence of spies and rival factions. The tension escalates as she learns of a rivalry with Isabella d'Este, who employs her own spies to monitor Lucrezia's movements. The secretive nature of court life, filled with hidden agendas, complicates Lucrezia's endeavors to build relationships while asserting her own position.

Amidst these social dynamics, Lucrezia captures the admiration of poets and writers, notably Pietro Bembo. Their poetic correspondence reveals a deepening emotional connection that defies her marital status with Alfonso. This literary bond illustrates Lucrezia's yearning for romance and artistic expression, providing her with solace in tumultuous times.

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The political landscape surrounding Lucrezia profoundly evolves following her father's death and her brother Cesare Borgia's struggling authority. Cesare's attempts to maintain power amidst growing threats reflect the Borgia family's precarious standing. As Lucrezia contemplates the future of her family, she is acutely aware of the challenges that lurk ahead.

The atmosphere darkens as Cesare's ambition leads to ruthless actions against former allies, resulting in public executions that send shockwaves through the court. The resulting fear unsettles Lucrezia, forcing her to confront the inherent dangers her family faces, exacerbated by increasing scrutiny from their enemies.

The instability of the Borgia legacy is further underscored by Alexander VI's suspicious death, which leaves a trail of corruption and decay. Lucrezia must navigate the treacherous waters of court politics, filled with insincere courtiers and shifting allegiances, all while trying to secure her own power. Her resilience becomes a key theme, illustrating her determination to withstand the turbulence around her.

Ultimately, while grappling with personal grief, Lucrezia strategizes to bolster Cesare's fading influence. Her unwavering commitment to her family's survival in the face of adversity foreshadows the upcoming challenges that will test her strength and fortitude within the murky depths

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of political machination and romantic entanglements.

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# Chapter 10 Summary: 10. The Dark Marquis

## Chapter 10: The Dark Marquis - Summary

As summer turned to autumn in 1503, the city of Ferrara was ravaged by a devastating plague that drove the wealthy to seek refuge in their countryside villas, leaving the impoverished population to suffer the brunt of the health crisis. The plague's reach extended to Lucrezia Borgia's household, where she and her husband, Alfonso d'Este, remained isolated from the chaos.

Meanwhile, a significant political shift occurred in Rome with the death of Pope Pius III on October 17, 1503, just 26 days into his papacy. This unexpected event created turmoil for Cesare Borgia, whose enemies began to seize the opportunity to regain power. The ascendance of Pope Julius II, a fierce rival of the Borgias, on November 1, further threatened Cesare's already precarious position.

The increasing strain on Cesare's situation created tension in his relationship with Lucrezia. While she wished to support her brother during his struggles, Alfonso's focus shifted toward forming alliances to counter Cesare, straining Lucrezia's loyalties. Amidst these personal and political challenges, Lucrezia discovered she was pregnant again, which rekindled her bond with Alfonso despite his reservations about her literary ambitions and her enduring

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connection to Cesare.

As the year progressed, Cesare's political fortunes continued to decline. He faced mounting challenges to his territories, which seemed to slip further from his grasp as he sought desperately for alliances and protection. His situation culminated in a shocking arrest in Spain, arising from the complex machinations between the Pope and the Spanish nobility, which only deepened the turmoil surrounding the Borgia family.

In the midst of this chaos, Lucrezia began to demonstrate her political skill. With her father-in-law, Ercole, ill, she adeptly navigated the uncertain waters of succession in Ferrara, leveraging her position to solidify her influence as Duchess. Her partnership with Alfonso evolved as they sought to secure their roles following Ercole's decline, carefully balancing family loyalty with the broader political landscape. The impending arrival of their child added another layer of complexity to their relationship, as Lucrezia worked to ensure the continuation of her family's legacy amidst the turmoil of Renaissance Italy.

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# Chapter 11 Summary: 11. Duchess of Ferrara

## Summary of Chapter 11: Duchess of Ferrara

In this pivotal chapter, we witness the profound changes following the death of Ercole, the Duke of Ferrara, on January 25, 1505. His demise, initially a cause for concern over potential family rivalries, transforms into a moment of celebration as his son Alfonso is swiftly invested as the new duke. Amid public festivities, Lucrezia Borgia, now the Duchess of Ferrara, secures her position and receives acclaim from both the court and the populace during Alfonso's investiture. This moment not only cements her role within the ducal family but also signifies a shift in power dynamics.

With Ercole's death, the Este family faces a reckoning regarding its legacy. Though Ercole expanded Ferrara and supported the arts, his reign was marred by corruption and mismanagement. Now, protecting the family's religious stature falls upon Lucrezia, who must navigate the ambitions and conflicts posed by her extended family members.

Lucrezia's household experiences significant changes after Ercole's passing. She dismisses the unpopular Polissena Malvezzi and embraces her love for the arts by supporting various artists and musicians. However, this artistic patronage occurs amid underlying tensions at court, reflecting the volatile

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political landscape.

Throughout her new responsibilities, Lucrezia is frequently preoccupied with the plight of her brother, Cesare Borgia, who remains imprisoned in Spain. Demonstrating her unwavering loyalty, she reaches out to influential allies to secure his release, highlighting both her emotional burdens and her determination to uphold familial bonds.

The challenges intensify as her region suffers from a devastating summer marked by plague and famine. Despite these dire circumstances, Lucrezia maintains correspondence with key figures like Francesco Gonzaga, working to support her brother and navigate the local political turmoil.

Amid her public duties, Lucrezia experiences profound personal sorrow with the loss of her newborn son, Alexandro. This tragedy deepens her emotional struggles as she endeavors to fulfill her role as Duchess while coping with private grief.

The chapter also explores the rekindled romance between Lucrezia and Francesco Gonzaga, adding a complex layer to her life amidst courtly rivalries. These relationships are complicated further by ongoing conflicts among the Este brothers, each vying for power and influence, particularly concerning their ambitions and interactions with other members of the Borgia family, such as Angela Borgia.

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As tensions simmer, growing animosities between the Este siblings become apparent, driven by personal grievances linked to their political aspirations. In an effort to restore harmony, Alfonso steps in to mediate, achieving a temporary reconciliation. However, the peace remains unstable, hinting at the precarious nature of familial relationships within the court.

In conclusion, Lucrezia's inaugural year as Duchess is marked by a tumultuous blend of loss, political stratagem, and emotional trials. Balancing her duties with her personal challenges, she navigates a complex and evolving landscape, firmly establishing her role within a family caught in the throes of political intrigue and rivalry. As events continue to unfold, her position is set to be continually tested in the turbulent world of Ferrara.

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# Chapter 12: 12. The Congiura

## Chapter 12: The Congiura

### Introduction

Set in the politically charged atmosphere of 1506, this chapter revolves around Lucrezia Borgia and her husband Alfonso, as they navigate familial tensions and intricate alliances with various noble families.

### Carnival Celebrations

The narrative begins with the carnival celebrations, marking a temporary reconciliation among family members. Lucrezia and Alfonso partake in the festivities, with Alfonso wearing opulent attire, indicative of his status, even as the family mourns recent strife. However, the backdrop of joy is marred by underlying tensions, particularly involving Giulio, who feels overlooked and harboring resentment due to his disfigurement.

### Marriage Arrangements

Lucrezia takes a proactive role in arranging advantageous marriages for young women in her court, emphasizing her influence and authority. She

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employs stern measures against reluctant suitors, further showcasing her determination to solidify family alliances through matrimonial ties.

## **Political Intrigue**

The political landscape is disrupted when a conspiracy, dubbed the Congiura, emerges against Alfonso. This plot is fueled by ambition and resentment, particularly from Giulio and other discontented nobles. Nevertheless, the conspirators struggle to unify their efforts, showcasing their ineptitude and disorganization, which ultimately leads to failed assassination attempts on Alfonso's life.

## **Alfonso's Absence and Lucrezia's Role**

As Alfonso travels to Venice, Lucrezia is left in charge of governing Ferrara, revealing her capacity for leadership. However, she soon falls ill, prompting Alfonso to delay his journey to ensure her well-being, indicating the depth of their bond amidst political chaos.

## **Growing Tensions and Discovery of the Conspiracy**

The plot thickens as tensions rise, culminating in the arrest of several conspirators, including a servant of Giulio's. The chaotic execution of their plans illustrates the conspirators' desperation; their failing attempts to

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conspire against Alfonso underline the fractious nature of their alliance.

## **Judicial Proceedings**

In response to the conspiracy, Alfonso launches a trial for the captured conspirators. While he offers a semblance of justice through a fair trial process, the severity of the punishments meted out reflects the harsh realities of political treachery, contrasting ideals of justice with the brutality of power politics.

## **Public Execution and Aftermath**

Alfonso's demonstration of authority culminates in public executions of the conspirators, serving as a warning to others. However, Giulio and Ferrante find themselves imprisoned but treated with unexpected leniency, hinting at complex loyalties. Lucrezia experiences turmoil as she reconciles the consequences of her family's betrayals and the fates of those involved, leading to emotional conflict and reflection on her loyalties.

## **Continued Political Maneuvering**

The political landscape is further complicated by the return of Cesare Borgia, whose influence rekindles tensions with the Papacy and reshapes Lucrezia's political environment. His presence serves as a reminder of the

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enduring complexities in the power dynamics surrounding her family.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter concludes by highlighting the fragility of power and the intricate web of alliances and enmities characterizing the Borgia family's world. Lucrezia skillfully navigates these treacherous dynamics, balancing her allegiance to her family with the expectations of her position, as she confronts the chaos that surrounds her.

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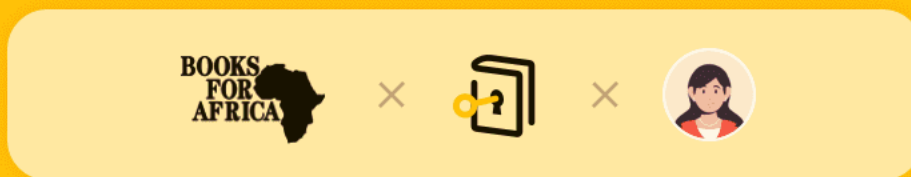




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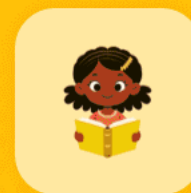
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## Chapter 13 Summary: 13. 'Horrors and Tears'

### Chapter 13: Horrors and Tears

As the year 1507 began, the city of Ferrara was alive with festivities, and Lucrezia Borgia was at the center of social life, engaging in celebrations, sending gifts to her friend Isabella, and hosting grand balls. However, amidst the revelry, Lucrezia's personal struggles resurfaced when she suffered a miscarriage in January, reigniting tensions with her husband, Alfonso d'Este, reflecting the challenging nature of their marriage.

The emotional landscape shifted dramatically for Lucrezia when she received the devastating news of her brother Cesare's death on March 12. Unbeknownst to her for weeks, the news, conveyed by Fra Rapahale, plunged her into profound sorrow. Cesare, known for his formidable ambition and complex legacy, had been a significant figure in her life, and his passing left her feeling lost. Although she maintained a facade of composure in public, her heart ached for her brother, highlighting the deep familial bonds that often came entwined with turmoil.

As the mourning period unfolded, Lucrezia withdrew from the vibrant social scene, her grief made palpable in the somber atmosphere of her household. While many admired Cesare's past achievements, discussions around his

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death were fraught with the complexities of his controversial reputation. Lucrezia's private sorrow was compounded by the public's mixed reactions, leaving her in a delicate emotional state.

Amid this turmoil, Lucrezia's romantic entanglements became increasingly complicated. Rumors circulated about her affair with Francesco Gonzaga, fueled by her passionate correspondence facilitated by the intermediary, Ercole Strozzi. This affair created a rift in her marriage, increasing tensions not only with Alfonso but also within the court, which had its own set of political intrigues woven into Lucrezia's personal life.

The backdrop of violence in Ferrara loomed large, with the assassination of close associates to Lucrezia, such as Don Martino and Ercole Strozzi, casting a shadow over her existence. These violent occurrences echoed the tumult of her family's history and the political stakes involved, emphasizing the dangerous world where loyalty and betrayal often collided.

Despite the chaos surrounding her, Lucrezia displayed remarkable resilience. She navigated her dual roles: a dutiful duchess adhering to societal expectations while passionately pursuing her relationship with Gonzaga. Her correspondence reflected not only her desire for intimacy but also her need for solace amidst the upheaval of her personal and political life.

In conclusion, Lucrezia's journey through the emotional waves of grief, love,

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and political intrigue reveals a woman caught between conflicting duties and desires. The birth of her son, Ercole, marked a new chapter in her life, challenging her to reconcile the legacy of her family's turbulent history with her hopes for the future, all while navigating the complexities of motherhood in a world fraught with danger and uncertainty.

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# Chapter 14 Summary: 14. The Years of War, 1509 – 12

### The Years of War, 1509–12

## Introduction

Between 1509 and 1512, Lucrezia Borgia emerged as the effective ruler of Ferrara during a time of great upheaval, primarily due to the Italian Wars and the ambitious maneuvers of Pope Julius II. This chapter delves into her remarkable ability to navigate the challenges of governance and warfare amidst shifting alliances.

## Lucrezia's Leadership

While her husband, Alfonso d'Este, was engaged in military campaigns, Lucrezia adeptly managed Ferrara, displaying her keen administrative acumen and an acute awareness of military matters. She prioritized the safety and education of her heir while skillfully negotiating conflicts with competing factions, including the Gonzagas and the Venetians.

## The League of Cambrai

The formation of the League of Cambrai in December 1508 marked a

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significant political shift. This coalition, ostensibly aimed at undermining Venetian power, inadvertently threatened Lucrezia's own territory. The League's members sought to recalibrate power among various Italian states, leading to escalating tensions in the region.

## **Challenges Faced**

Alfonso's frequent absences due to military duties left Lucrezia vulnerable to both military and political threats. The Venetians reclaimed territories once controlled by the Este family, exacerbating tensions in her court and challenging her leadership.

## **Communication with Allies**

Lucrezia maintained strategic communications with her imprisoned brother-in-law, Francesco Gonzaga, appealing for his support and assistance. These emotional correspondences underscored her reliance on familial ties and alliances for the security and stability of Ferrara.

## **Military Developments**

The battles of this period significantly impacted the regional balance of power, particularly the critical defeat of the Venetians at Agnadello in May 1509. Lucrezia took charge of disseminating information regarding troop

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movements and strategizing military responses, all while navigating the complexities of changing alliances involving foreign powers.

## **Papal Hostilities**

As tensions with Pope Julius II escalated, Lucrezia confronted the Pope's challenges to papal authority over southern Italy, leading to Alfonso's excommunication and a loss of privileges for Ferrara. Throughout these political crises, she sought diplomatic channels and rallied her allies to resist the encroachments from the papal forces.

## **Desperation and Struggle**

As the threats to Ferrara intensified, Lucrezia's calls for support became increasingly desperate. She implored Francesco Gonzaga for intervention against the Pope's ambitions, focusing her efforts on fortifying her city and maintaining morale among its inhabitants amidst the turbulence.

## **Personal Turmoil**

The toll of war weighed heavily on Lucrezia, both physically and emotionally. Complications from her pregnancies and personal losses added to her strain. In her letters to family, she conveyed her fears and the urgency of protecting her children, revealing a more vulnerable side to her otherwise

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resilient character.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter highlights Lucrezia Borgia's formidable strength and strategic intelligence during a chaotic period marked by warfare and political intrigue. Her adaptability and prowess in leadership not only shaped the fate of Ferrara but also solidified her place as a significant figure in the intricate political landscape of Renaissance Italy.

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# Chapter 15 Summary: 15. Lucrezia Triumphant

## Summary of Chapter 15: Lucrezia Triumphant

### Introduction

In 1512, Lucrezia Borgia and her husband Alfonso d'Este commemorated the safeguarding of Ferrara by commissioning elegant engraved silver plaques dedicated to San Maurelio. This chapter delves into the myriad challenges Lucrezia faced during this period, from personal grief to the intricacies of her marriage, highlighting her strength amid adversity.

### Artistic Representations

The silver plaques celebrated Lucrezia's beauty at the age of thirty-two, illustrating her in resplendent attire alongside their son, Ercole II. This poignant imagery contrasts sharply with the sorrow that would soon envelop her life, particularly following her tragic experiences.

### Personal Loss

Devastation struck when Lucrezia's eldest son, Rodrigo, succumbed to illness. His death plunged her into profound grief, prompting her to retreat to

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a convent for a month as she grappled with her overwhelming sorrow.

## **Struggles for Inheritance**

In the wake of Rodrigo's death, Lucrezia endeavored to reclaim her son's inheritance, a task complicated by intricate negotiations with the Este family. This process not only extended her period of mourning but also intensified her emotional turmoil as she navigated familial obligations and expectations.

## **Political Intrigue**

The political landscape shifted with the passing of Pope Julius II, a long-standing adversary of the Borgias. Lucrezia perceived this transition as a potential respite from threats against her family, allowing her to envision a brighter future for Ferrara.

## **New Alliances and Challenges**

Lucrezia's hopes soared with the ascension of Pope Leo X, although his ambitions soon introduced fresh complications. Actively engaged in the governance of Ferrara, Lucrezia corresponded with influential figures, striving to fortify her family's position and ensure the stability of their realm.

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## **Family Dynamics**

Despite expanding her family, Lucrezia remained haunted by the specter of loss, having endured numerous difficult pregnancies and the deaths of several children. Her maternal role remained a cornerstone of her identity, reflecting her resilience and dedication to her children amidst the persistent trials of motherhood.

## **Cultural Engagement**

Throughout her struggles, Lucrezia sustained connections with humanist thinkers and championed cultural projects, emphasizing her commitment to the arts and education. Her support for the publication of significant literary works within her court enhanced her legacy, illustrating her influence on the intellectual landscape of her time.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter portrays Lucrezia as a figure of resilience, skillfully navigating the complexities of personal grief and political challenges. Her commitment to her family's legacy, combined with her patronage of the arts, underscores her multifaceted contributions to both Ferrara and the broader cultural milieu of the Renaissance.

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# Chapter 16: 16. The Last Year of Tranquillity

### Chapter 16: The Last Year of Tranquillity

## Context and Overview

In 1518, Lucrezia Borgia, the Duchess of Ferrara, finds herself navigating the multifaceted roles of mother, wife, and governor during a rare period of peace in Italy. This tranquility allows her to engage more deeply in cultural and domestic activities. The chapter highlights Lucrezia's active role in managing court affairs, as well as her participation in the lively carnival festivities of the year.

## Festivities and Social Life

The vibrant Carnival of 1518 breathes joy into the Ferrara court, characterized by elaborate street masking regulated by strict guidelines. Among the highlights is the marriage of one of Lucrezia's attendants, symbolizing the mingling of personal and public celebrations. Festivities include tilting at the quintain—an ancient game of skill—dances, and indulgent banquets, all orchestrated by Lucrezia, who aims to showcase the court's grandeur and hospitality.

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## **Culinary Culture**

The chapter delves into the culinary practices of the time, notably influenced by Church mandates that restricted meat consumption during Lent.

Lucrezia's kitchen is a hub of activity, boasting a variety of ingredients, including luxurious pig products and exotic spices from East Asia, a reflection of the opulent dining culture restored by her husband, Alfonso. His keen interest in gastronomy fosters an environment of lavishness that had been stunted by years of warfare.

## **Household Management**

Lucrezia's adept management of the household is examined through her meticulous financial records, which reveal her direct involvement in overseeing staff payments and the commissioning of goods and services. Concurrently, Alfonso's ambitious building projects highlight a shared vision between the couple—one that intertwines his aesthetic sensibilities with Lucrezia's influence on court life.

## **Health and Family Matters**

Health hangs over Lucrezia and her family, posing obstacles to her public responsibilities. Despite facing various ailments, her commitment to governance remains steadfast. A noteworthy aspect of her family life is her

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relationship with her half-brother, Giovanni Borgia, marked by a blend of care and frustration due to his erratic behavior.

### **Interactions with Isabella and Governance**

The dynamics between Lucrezia and Isabella d'Este evolve throughout this chapter. Initially fraught with tension, their relationship shifts toward a more amicable partnership, underpinned by their shared familial responsibilities and governance duties. Personal correspondence reveals lingering complexities yet highlights their resolve to find commonality.

### **Alfonso's Absence and Lucrezia's Leadership**

When Alfonso departs for France, Lucrezia steps into a leadership role, balancing mercy with justice in her governance. Her approach to administering local justice underscores her character as a principled leader, advocating for compassion in cases otherwise calling for severe penalties.

### **Correspondence During Separation**

Throughout Alfonso's absence, the couple maintains a strong connection through letters, showcasing their mutual affection and joint stewardship of family and state affairs. Lucrezia's correspondence reflects both her joy in his safe travels and her adept management of court activities while he is

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away.

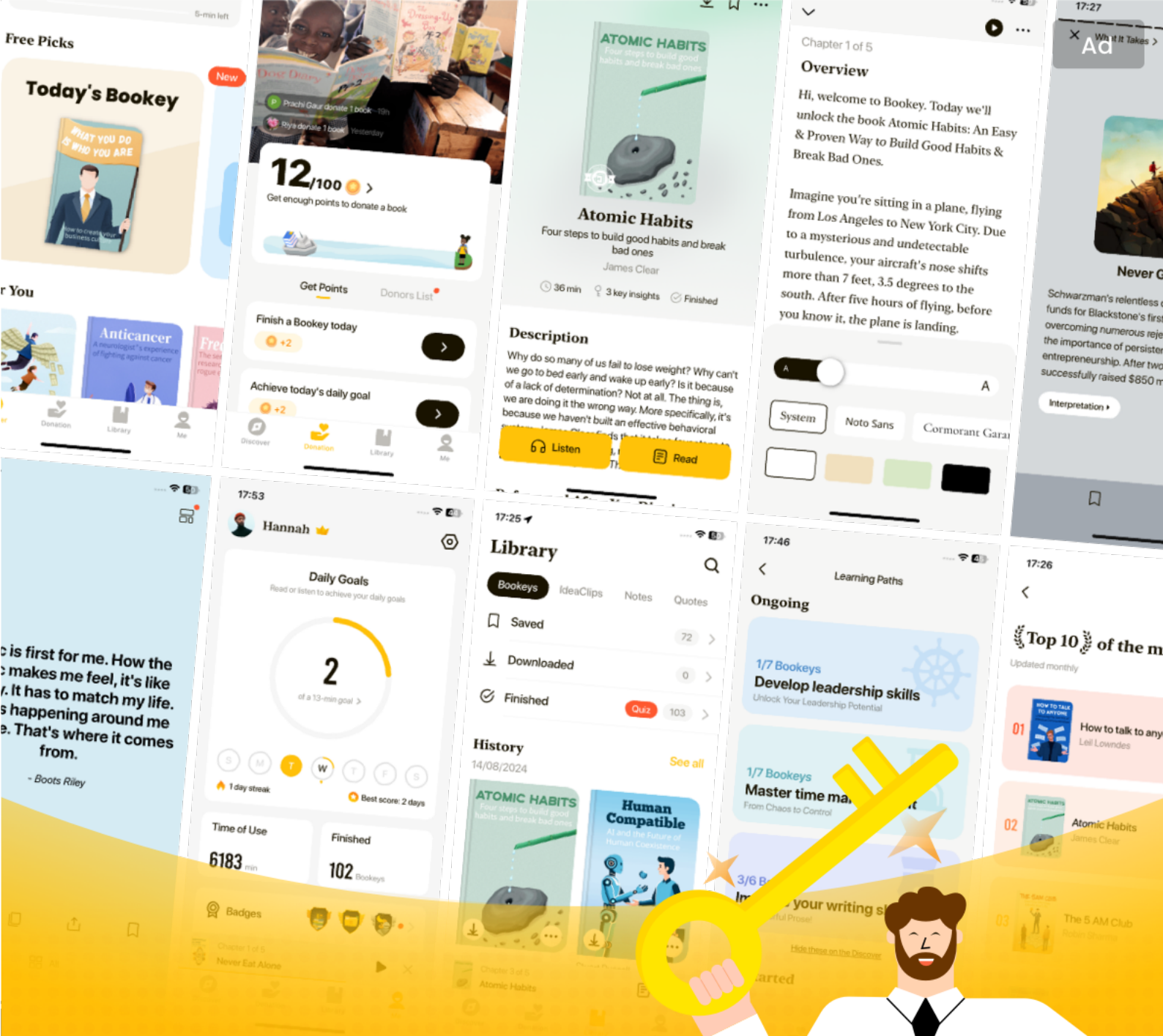
## Family Health Issues and Vannozza's Death

The chapter's later sections address health concerns within Lucrezia's family,

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# Chapter 17 Summary: 17. The End

## Summary of Chapter 17: The End

### Lucrezia's Final Days

On June 22, 1519, Lucrezia Borgia, aware of her impending death following a difficult pregnancy, dictated a heartfelt letter to Pope Leo X. In her communication, she conveyed her resignation to fate, having given birth to a daughter yet finding her health diminishing rather than improving.

### Alfonso's Return and the Carnival

Meanwhile, Alfonso, Lucrezia's husband, returned home and engaged in carnival festivities with his sons, attempting to uphold a semblance of normalcy amid growing concerns for Lucrezia's well-being. Despite rising rumors regarding her deteriorating condition, Alfonso remained focused on his responsibilities, drawing clear boundaries around his public life.

### Death of Francesco Gonzaga

Tragedy struck on March 24, 1519, with the death of Francesco Gonzaga due to a prolonged illness. Lucrezia maintained a close correspondence with

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him until his passing, sharing intimate thoughts and affection, all while balancing her personal emotions with the political intricacies of her life.

### **Superstition and Sense of Impending Loss**

Lucrezia's letters during this period reflected a growing obsession with superstitions and a foreboding sense of loss. She expressed her worries about her health and conveyed cautionary advice to Alfonso, indicating her protective nature over him even as her own life hung in the balance.

### **Health Decline and Complications of Pregnancy**

Through May and June, complications from Lucrezia's pregnancy intensified her physical suffering and caused significant concern for Alfonso. Although she welcomed the fragile birth of their daughter, Isabella Maria, Lucrezia's condition deteriorated, deepening the gravity of her situation.

### **Final Hours and Death**

On the fateful day of June 22, Lucrezia, feeling the weight of mortality, penned a poignant message to the Pope while fiercely battling her illness. Despite the valiant efforts of her physicians to stave off death, she passed away that night, leaving Alfonso enveloped in profound sorrow.

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## Alfonso's Mourning

In the aftermath of Lucrezia's passing, Alfonso mourned deeply, reaching out to relatives to share the depth of his grief. He acknowledged Lucrezia not just as his wife, but as a cherished companion, articulating in his letters the intense spiritual and emotional bond they had shared, solidifying her memory in his heart.

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