

**BASTIANO,
or
THE ART OF RIVALRY**

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CHARACTERS:

MICHELANGELO, (a version of) the 16th century sculptor, painter, poet, architect—a brooding talent with a quick temper. Gay but secretive about it. Religious. Competitive. From Florence. He comes from a minor family (the Buonarottis) with major pretensions and very little money.

RAPHAEL, the 16th century painter and architect, from Urbino. He is urbane and well-dressed, immensely charming and talented, a favorite of Pope Leo X.

SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO—a warm-hearted Venetian colorist with a passion for good food and good times, brought by Julius II to Rome. An early friend of Michelangelo's with whom he collaborated on many paintings. At the moment of the play, he is about to become a father and is thus always in need of money. Married to **BEATRICE**.

BEATRICE, Sebastiano's wife (don't bother Googling her because I made her up!), a poet and occasional model for painters, fierce, imaginative, longing for immortality in a culture that barely recognizes her existence, pregnant for the first time. She has big "Venetian red" hair. Also plays: **THE YOUNG MONK, DANILO**, servant to Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, whose expertise is dressing the Cardinal.

CARDINAL GILIO DE' MEDICI, the powerful, arrogant second-in-command to Pope Leo X and later Pope himself (Clement VII). A self-satisfied, quixotic but brilliant man who relishes power and loves art. It is he who is responsible for many of the most important Papal commissions of the period, including Sebastiano and Michelangelo's "The Raising of Lazarus" and Raphael's "The Transfiguration."

AGOSTINO CHIGI —a wily, well-connected Renaissance financier who first pitted Raphael and Sebastiano against each other by commissioning them to paint adjacent murals in his elegant Villa Farnesina in Rome. Banker to Pope Leo X and close friend of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, Chigi is the inventor of "indulgences" by which the Catholic Church paid for the building of St. Peter's.

TIME AND PLACE:

The play takes place between 1516-1520 in Renaissance Rome. Locations include the home and studio of Sebastiano, an anteroom of Chigi's elegant house in Rome, and the Cardinal's dressing room. We move fluidly from space to space with no breaks.

SETTING:

A large room of classical proportions and style. There are windows with Italian shutters. Perhaps there is a projection surface. There is probably a central table, and

an easel or two where Michelangelo and Bastiano can review their work. By the end of the play, we will need to see both paintings and a series of drawings—this is entirely up to the director to solve! An almost totally bare stage would work perfectly—leave the rest up to our imaginations.

NOTES ON THE PLAY:

BASTIANO OR THE ART OF RIVALRY was begun during a Writer's Residency at the Bogliasco Foundation on the Ligurian coast of Italy (for which I am eternally grateful). It was initially inspired by an exhibition at the National Gallery in London called "Michelangelo and Sebastiano" that chronicled the strange friendship and collaboration between two artists who were radically different but eventually joined forces against a common enemy, Raphael. In 1516, Sebastiano and Raphael were each commissioned to create a painting for the altar of the Narbonne Cathedral in France. Sebastiano was assigned "The Raising of Lazarus", Raphael "the Transfiguration." The competition was fierce and intense. Sebastiano recruited his friend Michelangelo to create and paint the figure of Lazarus in his painting; Raphael waited until he had secretly seen their work before he completed his own painting. Both paintings contain many mysteries.

Rome under Pope Leo X was a complicated and dangerous place, in which great artists competed for lucrative commissions for the Papal palace, the tombs and villas of the wealthy, and church altarpieces. This was a period of immense change, as the winds of the Protestant Reformation were beginning to blow and the Vatican was under constant threat from French kings to the north and other Italian city states to the east. As Matthias Wivel notes in his catalogue for the exhibition, the tale takes place "in a period of war, schism and revolution, but also of philosophical renewal, radical theology and great artistic innovation." On the surface was exquisite creative expression, underneath was a deep terrain of anti-Semitism, homophobia, racism, misogyny and fear of change.

What gripped me the most about this story was how incredibly high the stakes were for making art in the sixteenth century. Battles raged over aesthetic choices and Papal preferences, over money and belief (or lack thereof) and interpretation, over "authentic" expression versus corporate acquiescence. Tens of thousands of people lined up to see Raphael's last painting after he died. Hundreds of years later, the work of that period is more mysterious than ever and also often not what we expect; as our own lens has radically changed, what do these astonishing paintings tell us about who we are now? These are the questions I have tried to wrestle with as I wrote BASTIANO.

And here are the paintings that came out of the competition:



RAPHAEL'S TRANSFIGURATION (In the painting, the Apostles are in the lower left foreground, looking astonished and pointing at the sky. There is a possessed boy on the lower right side of the painting, also pointing up, with his eyes rolled back in his head. In the center of the painting is a beautiful woman in pink, Mary Madgalene, her body twisted towards the Apostles in a serpentine pose. In the top third of the painting, Christ miraculously levitates, his white robes and long red curls blowing)



THE RAISING OF LAZARUS by Sebastiano del Piombo and Michelangelo. *(The Painting depicts one of the final miracles of Christ, in which Jesus returns to the town of Bethany where a beloved young man has died, and agrees to help his sisters, Martha and Mary, by bringing Lazarus back from the dead. Sebastiano painted the entire surround of the painting, including the figures of Christ and the women, while Michelangelo painted the massive figure of Lazarus and the two men helping him out of the tomb).*

ACT ONE

Rome, 1516. Beatrice is modelling for her husband Sebastiano, who is painting a "Madonna and Child". Beatrice, her wild red hair flowing over her shoulders, is pregnant, although it hardly shows. She is draped with a deep blue cloth; her right hand cradles a rolled-up bundle standing in for the baby Jesus.

SEBASTIANO

Shake out your mane, my darling! *(she tosses her hair)* That's it! I'm going to over-glaze every strand with a touch of lead white so your hair glows in the sunlight like Moses and the burning bush.

BEATRICE

The burning bush?! *(she laughs)* Would you still love me if I were bald?

SEBASTIANO

Such a thing is impossible to imagine. *(sketching)* Just think, when the baby's born, I'll have the perfect Virgin *and* the perfect baby Jesus to paint ...

BEATRICE

That's right. The full Madonna kit.

SEBASTIANO

Can you splay your left hand more? *(demonstrating)* Like this. I'm trying to catch the shadow cast by each individual finger... *(working away)* Did you know-- Don Jeronimo was so obsessed by your hands in my Lamentation, he commissioned this Madonna just so I'd paint them again!

BEATRICE

Aren't we lucky the Spanish Ambassador appreciates my body parts... *(she stretches)* Sorry. My neck hurts. *(beat)* I have an idea! What if the baby's about to slide off her lap and she looks down quickly, and catches him— *(she demonstrates a graceful catch)*

SEBASTIANO

(laughing) I'm not sure the Baby Jesus should slide off her lap. She's the *Virgin Mary!*

BEATRICE

Does being a Virgin imply you're a good mother? That doesn't bode well for me.

SEBASTIANO

You're going to be perfect.

BEATRICE

I guess it's all trial and error... *(thinking)* Maybe Mary has a cranky baby who won't sit still. How about instead of trying to hold him in her lap, she's lying down and flying him around in the air—like this! *(she demonstrates)*

SEBASTIANO

That's beautiful —with your hair falling over the bench—let me try...

BEATRICE

Get ready. If we have a girl, you'll have to start painting *female* baby Jesuses.

SEBASTIANO

(smiling) You think so?

BEATRICE

No question. Art imitates life. When Michelangelo's painting a woman, everyone knows it's just a male model with breasts tacked on, and no one complains! *(she rolls over and looks at Bastiano)* Do you think he *cares*? What people think?

SEBASTIANO

I think he cares what one person thinks.

BEATRICE

Right. *(beat)* Will Tomasso ever acknowledge him, do you guess?

SEBASTIANO

Michelangelo would never let him... he's too tormented about the whole thing ...

BEATRICE

Plenty of men have loved other men—is it so terrible?

SEBASTIANO

He's a believer, Michelangelo. Honestly-- he's more religious than any of us! He thinks his feelings are a sin against God, against everything the Church stands for. So he's constantly torn...

BEATRICE

What a nightmare.

SEBASTIANO

(shrugging) It's why his work is so dramatic.

BEATRICE

He should ask his muses what they feel about doing such bizarre things. I mean... do those guys *want* to be pressed against a stone pillar for hours on end while he experiments with imprisonment?

SEBASTIANO

They're *models*!

BEATRICE

They're poor people trying to pay their rent. It's seems so unnecessary. Maybe it's time for us muses to revolt. (*she sits up, tosses her hair*)

SEBASTIANO

(*watching her*) Now what am I drawing? Mary in revolt?

BEATRICE

Yes! How about Mary rebelling against immaculate conception—that would be good.

SEBASTIANO

How can she rebel when she has such an adorable baby?

BEATRICE

Do you think she had morning sickness? Did the Virgin Mary ever puke up while carrying Our Lord?

SEBASTIANO

Hard to say. The Bible is silent on that point...

BEATRICE

If you were Michelangelo you wouldn't care how outrageous your work was. You'd paint what you wanted.

SEBASTIANO

Why are you so obsessed with Michelangelo today?

BEATRICE

Because I know he's coming back to Rome soon, and then you two will disappear into your studio and I'll be left tending basil plants in the kitchen window...

SEBASTIANO

Think of all the writing you'll get done! (*beat*) He's going to help me with my Flagellation...

BEATRICE

Ah. Michelangelo can always be counted on for a good flagellation.

SEBASTIANO

Let's catch this light! Could you sit up for a sec and imagine you're seeing a little lamb frolicking over your right shoulder!

BEATRICE

A lamb?

SEBASTIANO

He goes with my John the Baptist. When a donor asks for a lamb, I make sure to give him a lamb.

BEATRICE

Can the Virgin roast the Baptist's lamb over a spit, with some nice pasta on the side? *(she gets up)* I'm starving.

SEBASTIANO

Okay. Dinner time. *(he kisses her)* What a restless muse you have become! What's the matter?

BEATRICE

(pacing around) It just seems *wrong* to me. Why are models always fodder to be used up and tossed away, when we're providing all the inspiration...?

SEBASTIANO

I will never use you up.

BEATRICE

Well, I warned you, my darling! One day soon we're going to rise up—all us poor unrecognized muses—we're going to dance around naked and demand our rights! And then in churches across Rome, paintings will suddenly be full of screaming protesting humanity, and all your Cardinals and Priests and patrons will panic and wonder what has become of the refined beauty of Renaissance art? Watch out, Bastiano. This is going to be huge!

Crossfade to the Cardinal and his banker, Agostino Chigi, in the Cardinal's rooms at the Vatican, in the midst of a heated conversation while they play chess.

CARDINAL

It will have to be huge. That altar is enormous. *(he moves a pawn)*

CHIGI

How much are we paying?

CARDINAL

Why should we pay? Get *them* to pay, Chigi! Narbonne is incredibly rich. Why else did Leo want it back from the French?

CHIGI

To screw Cardinal Bricconnet out of his bishopric so you could have it instead.

CARDINAL

(smiling) That too. Never underestimate a Medici. Your move. *(beat. Chigi moves)* We need to find the perfect candidate to paint it. Someone to inspire the fear of God in people so they'll shut up about everything else...

CHIGI

(nodding) It worked with the Sistine.

CARDINAL

Those Sistine figures were too tormented. The Church does not need to be peddling *torment*. In fact, we don't require doubt of any kind. Art is the opposite of doubt. *(he moves a piece)*

CHIGI

(agreeing) Especially if you want it to sell... *(moves a piece)*

CARDINAL

So who gets the commission?

CHIGI

Everyone good is already overbooked.

CARDINAL

There must be an exciting young thing who's just come to town... some Venetian with a great color palette? *(he picks up a piece)* On second thought, maybe a Florentine... they follow the rules. *(moves a piece)*

CHIGI

How about Giulio Romano?

CARDINAL

He's so pedestrian. This person has to deliver a gorgeous Mary Magdalene. Her relics are in the crypt there.

CHIGI

They are? How did that happen?

CARDINAL

Fate. Forget Romano. Surely we can do better than him.

CHIGI

(moving a piece) Andrea del Sarto?

CARDINAL

Bland. His faces look like puddings. And he's slow. *(beat)* What about Lorenzo Lotto? He's not the subtlest, but he comes through when you need to deliver *big*.

CHIGI

I think his Madonnas look like they came out of a kit.

CARDINAL

You do? *(he laughs)*

CHIGI

Your move.

CARDINAL

He's such a nervous Nellie, anyway—we should send him back to Bergamo. *(moves a piece. Chigi swoops in and takes it)* Damn. Missed that.

CHIGI

Forgive me, Your Eminence. *(beat)* Okay. Who does gorgeous women?

CARDINAL

Raphael, hands down. The most beautiful breasts in town.

CHIGI

Raphael's got a thousand commissions --

CARDINAL

But he might do this one if we made it worth his while. Think how ravishing his Magdalene would be ... *(he thinks for a moment and moves his Queen. Chigi watches him)*

CHIGI

You don't want to do that.

CARDINAL

Why not? I'm willing to sacrifice a Queen for the promise of greater things to come...

CHIGI

You and Raphael have that in common. *(taking another piece)* I keep hoping he'll paint 'Cesca one day.

CARDINAL

You already have her in your bed, why do you need her hanging on your wall?

CHIGI

It pleases me when my artists and my lovers create value together.

CARDINAL

And you make money off them both.

CHIGI

(moving his pawn beside the Cardinal's queen) Check!

CARDINAL

(startled) Already?

CHIGI

Afraid so. *(he smiles)* If you thought more about chess and less about art, maybe you'd win once in a while.

CARDINAL

If you thought more about art and less about chess, maybe you wouldn't be such a philistine! *(thinking)* I could try to get Leo to give Raphael the St. Peter's commission in exchange for doing us this little favor...

CHIGI

Michelangelo will kill you.

CARDINAL

(angrily) Let him try. Getting the Sistine done was a living hell—I refuse to go through that again. *(he sweeps the pieces off the board, back into their box)* Raphael's so charming, he makes everything look easy.

CHIGI

And he sends wine from his own vineyard just when you need it.

CARDINAL

He likes beauty! That's all that matters. Narbonne doesn't want agony. They want Raphael.

CHIGI

Another game?

CARDINAL

No. I hate chess.

CHIGI

(laughing) Why? Winning is the key to longevity! *(beat)* In fact, I have an idea for your Narbonne commission.

CARDINAL

A chess match in the crypt?

CHIGI

Even better. Why not set up a *competition* for who paints the altarpiece?

CARDINAL

That'll take twice as long.

CHIGI

It'll raise the stakes! Rivalry brings out the best in artists—it's like bear-baiting for the cultural elite. When Bastiano and Raphael competed to paint my villa, the walls turned into a *battlefield*. I mean it-- by the end there was blood on the floor—all for a simple fresco in a dining room.

CARDINAL

But was it a good fresco?

CHIGI

Sublime. *(he smiles)* These artists think they're gods—I like to disabuse them of that illusion.

CARDINAL

Does that mean we could get two paintings for the piece of one... and keep them both if they're good? That would please the Pope.

CHIGI

Of course. *(he smiles)* Who could we pit against Raphael?

CARDINAL

Why not Sebastiano? This gives him the perfect chance for revenge.

CHIGI

We can't put the poor fool through that again. He's my man—I found him in Venice and dragged him here myself! I promised I'd look after him.

CARDINAL

Then do it! I'm sure he needs the money. My spies tell me his wife is pregnant.

CHIGI

Finally. They've been trying for years. *(thinking)* Sebastiano would certainly keep Raphael on his toes ...

CARDINAL

And his colors would be sublime... all that watery Venetian light... *(thinking)* It's a good idea. Raphael versus Sebastiano!

CHIGI

What subject matter were you thinking of?

CARDINAL

For Raphael-- the Transfiguration! It's the Pope's obsession right now-- the power of the Trinity to vanquish the Devil. It will need to include a stunning Mary Magdalene front and center, right under Jesus. And a moon! There will have to be a moon!

CHIGI

Why a moon?

CARDINAL

Don't you ever read the news? Narbonne just drove out the Saracens! Those Muslims are finally on the run, dragging their loathsome crescent behind them. At least we can celebrate that.

CHIGI

Without a doubt! And Sebastiano? Would he paint the same story?

CARDINAL

No! He's just finishing a Transfiguration -- don't you ever go to Church? We should give him something radically different... *(thinking)* what could it be?

CHIGI

Don't look at me-- I just write the checks.

CARDINAL

(thinking) We've just done a David...

CHIGI

And Moses ...

CARDINAL

And Adam ...

CHIGI

And Christ being flagellated...

CARDINAL

Twice.

CHIGI

So what's left? How about Paul being converted?

CARDINAL

No—that one's always about the horse. *(He thinks. Then, an idea!)* Lazarus!

CHIGI

I'm sorry?

CARDINAL

Let's assign Bastiano the Raising of Lazarus. The French love that story -- Lazarus even preached in Narbonne.

CHIGI

Really?

CARDINAL

It's perfect. Lazarus happens in the earth, the Transfiguration happens in the air—we'll attack the problem from both ends and see what they come up with! This will cement my legacy! That altarpiece could be more significant than the Sistine!

CHIGI

Let's hope it'll keep the public distracted for a while...

CARDINAL

It must! The Pope's on a knife edge --all those protests against indulgences—it's a disaster! We need to orchestrate the finest smoke and mirrors the Church has ever seen. Make it work, Agostino!

We segue to Sebastiano's studio. Michelangelo and Sebastiano are facing an easel.

SEBASTIANO

Help me. I can't make it work.

MICHELANGELO

I just came by to tell you I was back.

SEBASTIANO

It's fabulous to see you. Here's the problem. It's going to be a huge altarpiece—the story has to build *vertically*—

MICHELANGELO

Uh huh...

SEBASTIANO

But the event is *horizontal*. I mean, it's all about a *tomb*, right? Every way I shape it, the composition ends up feeling flat...

MICHELANGELO

Where's Lazarus supposed to go?

SEBASTIANO

Down here.

MICHELANGELO

And which moment of the miracle are you trying to paint?

SEBASTIANO

What do you mean?

MICHELANGELO

It's such a strange story – I've never been able to figure it out.

SEBASTIANO

Lazarus? It's so uplifting!

MICHELANGELO

You think so? A man has been underground for three days. His body is decomposing so fast it's starting to stink... (*Sebastiano tries to interrupt*) His sisters are in mourning, weeping by the tomb. And suddenly along comes Jesus, and boom, Lazarus has to come alive again...

SEBASTIANO

It's about belief! It's so beautiful-- listen. (*Bastiano crosses to a cupboard and retrieves a Bible. Flips through till he finds that Lazarus story. Reads*) "Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb where Lazarus was buried. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." (*Sebastiano looks up at Michelangelo and grins*)

MICHELANGELO

I don't have time to bathe. You know that. Go on.

SEBASTIANO

"Then Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God? I am the Resurrection and the Life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying.' So they took away the stone. And Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' "The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'"

MICHELANGELO

Okay. If I were painting this—the first question I would ask is, what if Lazarus doesn't want to be let go?

SEBASTIANO

Why wouldn't he? It's what everyone dreams of.

MICHELANGELO

Not everyone.

SEBASTIANO

You wouldn't want a second chance at life if you could get it?

MICHELANGELO

No.

SEBASTIANO

That's because you live in a hovel and have no friends. Except me.

MICHELANGELO

That's not why.

SEBASTIANO

Anyway, think of his sisters! They loved Lazarus so much, they couldn't bear to lose him. The resurrection was for them.

MICHELANGELO

Yes, but what did it actually accomplish? With the loaves and fishes, starving people got to *eat*! But Lazarus? He was only back for four days and then they lost him again. It's an ambivalent victory at best, don't you think?

SEBASTIANO

No! It's a miracle! One of Christ's greatest miracles! That's why the Vatican chose the subject. You're just like my Bea—she always looks for ambivalence when it's perfectly clear.

MICHELANGELO

What's clear about it? To paint it, you have to imagine how the situation must *feel*! Is Jesus doing this out of generosity, or is it just to prove a point? Is it just some insane party trick to make people believe? I mean, *no one* ever comes back from the dead. So who was this man, Jesus, who could make such a thing happen? That's what ordinary people wanted to know. (*beat*) That's what *I* want to know.

SEBASTIANO

He's our salvation.

MICHELANGELO

From what? From ourselves? *(beat)* I mean, why should Lazarus have a desire to live when the man pointing at him is only going to keep letting him down?

SEBASTIANO

(shocked) What are you talking about? That man pointing at him is Christ! And Christ is not the problem with this painting—I've already drawn him front and center and he looks amazing. The issue is Lazarus.

MICHELANGELO

The issue is how Lazarus feels about Christ. It's *existential*.

SEBASTIANO

Why are you always so full of doubt? You think it's because your mother abandoned you as a child?

MICHELANGELO

(impatiently) Please, Bastiano—you can do better than that.

SEBASTIANO

I worry about you, I really do.

MICHELANGELO

I'm full of doubt because I want to *understand!* To believe. To *really* believe. Don't you? Here we are, like Lazarus, mired in the dirt, unable to comprehend more than the merest fraction of God's will. We look up every day with blind eyes and we wait for enlightenment! Where do you think the will to live comes from? Has Lazarus left something unfinished in his life—something he longs to return to? Has he ever experienced love? Loss? Regret? Is he reaching up towards Christ like Adam reaching for an answer from God?

SEBASTIANO

I don't know... it's *possible*...

MICHELANGELO

And if so... should the figure look something like this? *(he starts to sketch a tall figure with an arm reaching out like the Adam of the Sistine ceiling. Sebastiano is watching)*

SEBASTIANO

(pointing to the down right corner of the painting) Be careful-- it has to fit into that hole.

MICHELANGELO

(sketching) Why?

SEBASTIANO

I told you-- I've already drafted the rest of the composition. All the Apostles, the sisters—wait till you see the sisters, they're so charming! -- and Christ glowing in the center --

MICHELANGELO

But Lazarus is what counts! He's the fulcrum—the heartbeat—the *mystery*! Without him, it's nothing.

SEBASTIANO

I'm on the clock! We've been given till December to deliver the paintings—Beatrice is due in October—and you know how much we need the money! They won't pay till it's finished—

MICHELANGELO

(paying no attention) What do you think of this —? *(showing him the drawing)*

SEBASTIANO

Oh. *(he holds the sketch)* He looks so confused—

MICHELANGELO

(nodding) Surprised. Yes. And in pain.

SEBASTIANO

You think it's about pain?

MICHELANGELO

I think desire is painful, yes. *(he continues to doodle)*

SEBASTIANO

Okay...

MICHELANGELO

I've made the head too small...

SEBASTIANO

I like it small. He's *veiled*. It will make us look at Christ's face instead!

MICHELANGELO

But the figure feels weak.

SEBASTIANO

Of course he's weak—the moment before this, he was *dead*!

MICHELANGELO

(ferociously sketching and re-sketching—now he is hooked!) You've boxed me into a ridiculous corner.

SEBASTIANO

I have? *(he hides a smile)*

MICHELANGELO

(staring at his drawing) You're going to have to find more space. Lazarus *can't* reach toward Christ because the hole's too small. It'll be *pathetic*, unless the gesture actually has room to *breathe*! *(he tears up his drawing and takes up another piece of paper)* Are we hoping to sense the blood flowing through his veins again? Like when your leg has fallen asleep and you feel the needle pricks as it comes back to life?

SEBASTIANO

How do you draw that?

MICHELANGELO

Give me a few days. Let me see if I can solve it.

SEBASTIANO

Seriously? *(grinning broadly)* You're going to work with me on this one?

MICHELANGELO

Just the Lazarus. I'm busy. You do the rest.

SEBASTIANO

(delighted) Bless you my friend! How wonderful! Like the "Pieta" all over again. Raphael won't stand a chance against us. Wait till the Cardinal and Chigi hear this—their competition now includes the painter of the Sistine!

MICHELANGELO

They hated every second of that process. By the way, why do your color renderings show Jesus in a *robe*? Shouldn't he be nude?

SEBASTIANO

The Pope likes my luminous pink, you know that. Besides, the robe will set off the exquisite ultramarine blue I'm going to drape over his arms.

MICHELANGELO

You're so Venetian... all you care about is color.

SEBASTIANO

You're so Florentine... all you care about is muscle.

MICHELANGELO

You don't think it takes *muscle* to come back from the dead?

SEBASTIANO

(laughing) I wish you'd come home months ago.

MICHELANGELO

I was in hiding from Leo. He was threatening to *abduct* me.

SEBASTIANO

Because you wouldn't come of your own free will. He's the Pope. You promised him!

MICHELANGELO

I'm not a spigot they can turn on at will.

SEBASTIANO

Yes, you are. In the eyes of the Vatican, we're all just spigots. Get used to it.

MICHELANGELO

I agree with your wife—I hate Rome and everyone in it. This town is full of poachers and thieves. That pig Bramante gave Raphael the keys to the Sistine the *one week* I was away—he climbed up on the scaffolding, looked at my work by candlelight, copied the Creation of Man—and when I returned, I found wax all over the planks, and a direct copy of one of my figures in his School of Athens! What kind of person does such a thing?

SEBASTIANO

A *fan*! An admirer!

MICHELANGELO

The worst thing is-- I'm not even sure he's a *believer*! And *still* the Pope showers him with commissions.

SEBASTIANO

He's a charming man. People like him. I like him.

MICHELANGELO

And me? And I not a charming man?

SEBASTIANO

(Italian pronunciation) "*Terribile*". That's the word they use to describe you.

MICHELANGELO

Why? *(beat. A real moment of doubt)* Why do people dislike me, Bastiano?

SEBASTIANO

They don't know you. And you could take a bath once in a while...

MICHELANGELO

It's Raphael they should be wary of. He's a killer. It's all a lie—that talk of *sprezzatura*! There's nothing remotely nonchalant about that man!

SEBASTIANO

But he gives great parties and he wears incredible clothes.

MICHELANGELO

(back to the drawing) Look at this. In that *ridiculously* small space you've left me, I have to squeeze in a heroic Lazarus *and* the men helping to raise him up! You don't make it easy, Bastiano. What are they supposed to be, midgets?

SEBASTIANO

Enough *contrapposto* and anything will fit.

MICHELANGELO

I hate painting. All I want right now is a chisel and some stone.

SEBASTIANO

(he smiles) What a tragedy you're never satisfied with what you've created.

MICHELANGELO

What a tragedy you always *are*. *(beat)* Okay. Let's beat Raphael at his own game. Pretentious prick. Let's make a Lazarus like nothing they ever imagined.

SEBASTIANO

(delighted) How I've missed you. You know you are the sun and the moon to me, Michele.

MICHELANGELO

Then slip behind a cloud and leave me alone. Let me work on this figure.

SEBASTIANO

Come and eat first. We'll cook you a nice meal.

MICHELANGELO

I ate this morning.

SEBASTIANO

(eagerly) Did you read Bea's latest poem, Michele? The one I sent you?

MICHELANGELO

I only read bills these days. My family is drowning in debt.

SEBASTIANO

What's it to you? They expect *you* to bail them out?

MICHELANGELO

They have the mistaken belief that art is a lucrative profession. I keep telling them we're pathetic mendicants, feeding off crumbs from the Church's fortune.

SEBASTIANO

(laughing) True.

MICHELANGELO

And where did that fortune come from? Indulgences! Oh-- and *salt*! Did you know Chigi now has a monopoly on salt? Another reason to get out of Rome!

SEBASTIANO

It's no better anywhere else. And I love salt. *(smiling)* I will never understand you, Michele.

MICHELANGELO

That's because you're from Venice. *(looking around with paranoia)* Okay. I'll work on it here instead of bringing it home. There are spies everywhere. Make sure you lock the doors when you leave the studio. And the windows. And the skylight. And put a chained dog on the roof to bark at intruders.

SEBASTIANO

No one wants to break in here, why would they? *(beat)* I'll leave the key on the ledge for you. Where it always is. If you need to get in.

MICHELANGELO

Bless you. Now get lost. *(Bastiano exits. Michelangelo carries the Lazarus drawing to the window, opens the shutters, and looks at it in the light. Sighs)* This is no way to make a masterpiece.

On the other side of the stage, the banker CHIGI'S elegant rooms in Trastevere.

RAPHAEL, chic and well-dressed, has entered, carrying a beautiful basket of grapes.

RAPHAEL

It will be a masterpiece, I promise you!

CHIGI

Have you even begun?

RAPHAEL

(bluffing) I'm in the conceptual phase! Have a grape.

CHIGI

(taking one) You'd better start painting. You're way behind.

RAPHAEL

Don't worry, once I get going, I'm fast.

CHIGI

All you have to do is stick Jesus on a mountaintop. Nothing radical. He's either nude or dressed, he has flowing locks or short curls, he's looking up left or he's looking up right. Basta.

RAPHAEL

Spoken like the man who pays the bills.

CHIGI

Steal something from Sebastiano's version! I hear he did a nice version... at some Church... recently.

RAPHAEL

There's nothing new there.

CHIGI

People don't want *new*, they want a Raphael.

RAPHAEL

(amused) "A Raphael"!

CHIGI

I'm speaking for myself. I'm a banker, I like to know what I'm buying.

RAPHAEL

What would please the Pope?

CHIGI

Something like your "Madonna of the Goldfinch"! Give him another one like that, and he'll be floating on air!

RAPHAEL

Floating on air? That's good! Maybe my Jesus should float.

CHIGI

Then we'd have to see his dirty feet. I hate dirty feet.

RAPHAEL

Perhaps his feet are dirty the rest of the time -- but the Transfiguration washes them clean! The story's about light, after all-- the sudden illumination of divine light.

CHIGI

It's about delivering the altarpiece by Easter.

RAPHAEL

The problem is...

CHIGI

The problem is, if you don't stop dithering and get it done, Sebastiano will win!

RAPHAEL

Bastiano's got *action*! He's got Christ doing a miracle and Lazarus rising up from the dead! I can't just paint a bunch of shocked Apostles collapsed on the ground while Jesus transfigures... it needs to be *beautiful*...

CHIGI

True. Things are bad at the Vatican. Give the Pope something to feel good about and he'll reward you handsomely. Oh, and make sure you include a moon.

RAPHAEL

The moon is the least of it.

CHIGI

No, it's not. Trust me.

RAPHAEL

Okay. I'll paint a moon. (*beat. Wrestling*) Here's the thing. The Transfiguration has no *story*. Jesus transfigures for two seconds and the Apostles don't even *notice*.

CHIGI

Your Galatea has no story either and who cares? She's got the best ass in town. All those luscious nymphs being fondled by naughty centaurs – they're worth the price of the whole fresco... By the way—couldn't you find a place for 'Cesca in your Transfiguration? I hate to bug you, but she keeps asking.

RAPHAEL

Really?

CHIGI

Why sleep with a banker, she complains, if he can't get you immortalized in a fresco?
Couldn't you use her for the Magdalene?

RAPHAEL

(dubiously) Can she sit still long enough?

CHIGI

If you put her in the right position.

RAPHAEL

I'll do my best. *(he smiles)* 'Cesca will be the inspiration for the fallen Magdalene. She will melt your loins and make you sing!

CHIGI

She already melts my loins and makes me sing.

RAPHAEL

Lucky man. *(faux casual)* So tell me... is it the rumor true? About Michelangelo?

CHIGI

What about him?

RAPHAEL

(nervously) I hear Bastiano has roped him in to design the figure of Lazarus.

CHIGI

(furious) He has? Why can't we keep that tramp in Florence?! He's like sewage that's been sent out to sea and keeps wafting back to town!

RAPHAEL

(smiling) What an apt simile...

CHIGI

If Michelangelo's involved, that poor Lazarus will be twisted in extreme *contrapposto*, flexing every muscle known to man.

RAPHAEL

All that *anatomy*. You'd think Michelangelo would have moved on by now...

CHIGI

It's grotesque! And Bastiano's too sweet to refuse. If I were you, I'd forget about what they're working on and get cracking on your own. It's a *competition!* The Cardinal wants *fireworks!*

RAPHAEL

I'll paint some kind of swirling human chaos down below. And Christ floating above, at the peak of the pyramid. Bathed in light. The agony and the ecstasy.

CHIGI

Wrong painter. The Pope wants joy and inspiration. Agony doesn't sell.

RAPHAEL

This is becoming embarrassing. *(he rises and opens the shutters of the window beside Michelangelo, so the two men are standing almost side by side, in the sunlight. Raphael stares out the window. The light flatters his gorgeous clothes. Michelangelo is still staring, unhappily, at his Lazarus drawing)*

MICHELANGELO

It's embarrassing. It's just *Adam*, all over again! What does a man look like who has just awakened from the dead? What does he *feel*? Terror? Joy? Wonder? *(He sighs. Begins to try out new poses in his own body, twisting around, experimenting with different angles... As he does so, Beatrice walks in. She stands silently, observing him)* The elbow will have to bend— *(he does so, cringes)* Ugh! There's no fucking *grace!* *(he turns and sees Beatrice)* Excuse me—I didn't realize--

BEATRICE

It's okay! Sorry to interrupt.

MICHELANGELO

Never mind—it was going nowhere—

BEATRICE

I didn't know you were here.

MICHELANGELO

(embarrassed) Let me get out of your hair--

BEATRICE

(laughing) My hair can take care of itself. *(carefully)* Is that the Lazarus?

MICHELANGELO

(erupting with disgust) He doesn't *fit!* He should be standing, triumphant! But with the space your husband left me, there's only room for a dwarf.

BEATRICE

Call it the *Squatting* of Lazarus and you'll be done!

MICHELANGELO

(smiling) The Miracle of the Midget. Yes. *(he sets the drawing down)* I give up.

BEATRICE

(indicating the drawing) May I see?

MICHELANGELO

Here. Write a comic verse about it! *(he hands her the drawing)*

BEATRICE

It looks like Adam from the Sistine ceiling, standing up--

MICHELANGELO

That was the idea-- I thought that his arm reaching high would work vertically, but it doesn't. It's a disaster.

BEATRICE

It's not a disaster, it's just ... *(she catches herself)*

MICHELANGELO

What?

BEATRICE

It's as if Lazarus isn't sure he even *wants* to come back to life.

MICHELANGELO

He's not.

BEATRICE

I like the face. The way it's twisted around to *look*—questioning what's happening...

MICHELANGELO

(frustrated) But it doesn't match the body, does it? The figure has no tension, no *life*. I need to start over. Tear that one up.

He turns to clear up his things and go. Beatrice turns the drawing on its side, where she sees handwriting. A poem. She looks more closely at the tiny letters and begins to read it aloud. When he hears her, he stops, caught.

BEATRICE

"If then my heart cannot endure the blaze
Of beauties infinite that blind these eyes,
Nor yet can bear to be from you divided,
What fate is mine?"--

MICHELANGELO

(reaching for the paper) I said tear it up.

BEATRICE

One sec. *(she keeps reading)*

“What fate is mine? Who guides or guards my ways,
Seeing my soul, so lost and ill-betided,
Burns in your presence, in your absence dies.”

MICHELANGELO

Please. *(he puts his hand out for the paper)*

BEATRICE

It's beautiful.

MICHELANGELO

It's nothing. I'd forgotten it was on there.

BEATRICE

(thinking) Maybe it's about love, the Lazarus story. Why else does Lazarus want to live again if not to ... burn in someone's presence, as you say? *(Michelangelo is quiet for a moment. Then he tentatively reaches his right hand out in a pose)*

MICHELANGELO

You think he's reaching for something?

BEATRICE

Maybe.

MICHELANGELO

Then what's the obstacle?

BEATRICE

Must there always be an obstacle?

MICHELANGELO

Have you ever felt love without instantly encountering an obstacle? *(beat. Thinking)*
What if he's still bound in his long white winding cloth? Could he reach across his body and try to free himself ... *(turning his face the opposite way)* ... while never taking his eyes off Christ?

SEBASTIANO

(from offstage) Mangiamo! *(“let's eat”)*

BEATRICE

I'm coming!

MICHELANGELO

So he's burning for Christ's eyes...

BEATRICE

And resisting his imprisonment at the same time! There's your obstacle!

MICHELANGELO

The obstacle is wanting to be loved by God. *(embarrassed. He takes the paper with the drawing and poem on it and tears it up)*

BEATRICE

(startled) No! Don't destroy it!

MICHELANGELO

I'll draw something better, I promise.

BEATRICE

And the poem?

MICHELANGELO

(sadly) It doesn't matter. I would never have sent it anyway. *(they exit in opposite directions. Crossfade back to Raphael and Chigi)*

RAPHAEL

I'm going to break into their studio and see what they're up to.

CHIGI

No! Absolutely not.

RAPHAEL

It'll unlock my imagination.

CHIGI

Too bad. Solve it yourself.

RAPHAEL

How about if *you* do it. You look, and report back. Please. Just so I know what I'm competing with.

CHIGI

This isn't my fight!

RAPHAEL

They trust you. (*flattering*) You're the man! Banker to the Pope. Inventor of indulgences.

CHIGI

(*snapping*) I didn't *invent* indulgences, I just figured out how to *market* them. (*Raphael smiles. Chigi is defensive*) Well, how are we supposed to pay for St. Peter's? The Pope is out of cash. You have a smarter idea?

RAPHAEL

Hand *me* St. Peter's to design—*that* would be a smarter idea. (*pleading*) Come on, Agostino. Slip into Bastiano's studio ... take a look at the Lazarus sketch... tell me how it fits into their scheme... and then I will give the Cardinal a Transfiguration beyond his wildest dreams.

CHIGI

You did this at my Villa and look what happened. Bastiano had made a beautiful clear horizon line and you ruined it! You humiliated him!

RAPHAEL

He's always been easy to steal from! But now he's got Michelangelo in his corner...

CHIGI

It's the only way he can compete with *you*.

RAPHAEL

Then let's compete! It's brilliant-- the collision of two titans and a hobbyist— and only one of us can win. This will be the catalyst my imagination requires. Please, Chigi! I dare you.

CHIGI

Even if I see it, what am I supposed to say? I know nothing about painting.

RAPHAEL

So find a key lying around his studio. Slip it in your pocket, and then drop it into the potted basil plant outside their door. I'll sneak in at night and take a quick look. No one will be the wiser...

CHIGI

You're impossible.

RAPHAEL

I'll never ask another favor.

CHIGI

Don't drop any wax on the floor. And put 'Cesca at the center of your painting.

RAPHAEL

It's a deal. Send word when you've put the key in the plant! The password will be... "*pesto*".

CHIGI

Pesto?

RAPHAEL

(laughing) Never mind.

He bows and exits. In another part of the stage, Sebastiano enters and discovers Beatrice, at the window. She has a wet cloth and is cleaning an old menorah. He startles her and she covers the menorah with the cloth. Places it on the table.

SEBASTIANO

Sorry I'm late. We've been working on the Lazarus.

BEATRICE

I figured as much. Jesus could've performed *ten* miracles in the time it's taken you to paint one!

SEBASTIANO

The painting's huge! I spent all day on Jesus' left toe! What are you doing?

BEATRICE

Cleaning something I found on the street. *(beat)* What does Michelangelo think of the painting so far?

SEBASTIANO

He loves it! Especially the figure of Martha gesturing like this *(he demonstrates)* – he said it reminded him of you.

BEATRICE

(surprised) He did?

SEBASTIANO

Well, I know he *thought* it. He's crazy about your hair. *(he kisses her)* There is no one I love painting more than you.

BEATRICE

Thank you, my love. Just finish it! It's freezing in here and we're broke.

SEBASTIANO

We're not broke, we're just a little short right now.

BEATRICE

You need to beat Raphael and collect the fee so we can organize ourselves—fast-- before the baby comes... Did Michelangelo find a Lazarus model?

SEBASTIANO

He's... trying. It's always a bit of a torment ...

BEATRICE

He doesn't have to *sleep* with one, he just has to draw him!

SEBASTIANO

(affectionately) But one draws best what one loves—you know that!

BEATRICE

Even if one loves someone with too many opinions?

SEBASTIANO

Especially. *(he grabs the tomatoes and begins to cut them up and toss them into the pan)* Dinner's coming up. How was your day?

BEATRICE

Something strange happened ...

SEBASTIANO

(excited) The baby? Did you feel him kick?

BEATRICE

(correcting him) Her. *(beat)* No. I took a wrong turn after leaving my boots at the cobbler and suddenly I was totally lost. I'd been thinking about something else... and when I looked up...

SEBASTIANO

Yes?

BEATRICE

I was outside the gates of the Ghetto.

SEBASTIANO

The Ghetto! That's miles away.

BEATRICE

I know. *(beat)* I looked inside. The streets are covered in filth—how do they stand it?

SEBASTIANO

(sprinkling basil leaves on the tomatoes) I suppose they're used to it.

BEATRICE

I saw women with big hair ... and children with tiny covered heads and dark eyes, staring out through the bars.

SEBASTIANO

You should be walking in the Borghese gardens, where the smells are sweet. You'd have much nicer thoughts. Have an olive. *(he puts one in her mouth)*

BEATRICE

(chewing) Sometimes I wonder why we're so anxious to have a child, in a city where everyone is afraid...

SEBASTIANO

How can you say that? We're not Jews! And we've longed for this baby for *years!*

BEATRICE

What happens when I can't model anymore?

SEBASTIANO

Stop worrying. They love me here—Borgherini's waiting for a new portrait-- Chigi will hire me as soon as his new villa is ready, and the Cardinal—

BEATRICE

(interrupting) The Cardinal thinks every surface in the Vatican should be painted by *Raphael*. I don't get it. Your work is so much more beautiful-- "Bastiano makes oil paint breathe like human skin!" That's what Giorgione said.

SEBASTIANO

(smiling) You always remember my nice reviews.

BEATRICE

All your reviews are nice! After you painted Chigi's dining room, he said he could feel the clouds passing whenever he walked in. *(Bastiano smiles)* It was so strange, staring through those gates. It felt like some kind of metaphor—

SEBASTIANO

For what?

BEATRICE

I don't know. It was as if I could *see* the reality in there... but I wasn't allowed to get at it—to experience it. *(beat. Abruptly)* Why aren't women allowed into your life drawing classes?

SEBASTIANO

It would be embarrassing.

BEATRICE

For whom?

SEBASTIANO

Everyone! To sketch a naked model with a woman standing beside me?—it would feel... *wrong*.

BEATRICE

But how are we ever supposed to compete if we can't look at the same things you're looking at?

SEBASTIANO

(smiling) Are you thinking of taking up painting, my love?

BEATRICE

Of course not, don't worry! *(just then, the shutter opens and we see Chigi outside)* Jesus! Isn't that--? *(the shutters shut)* How weird. I could've sworn I just saw your banker through the shutters. Go see! *(Sebastiano exits. Bea scrounges around for something else to eat. Sebastiano re-enters with Chigi)*

SEBASTIANO

Look who was digging around in our basil plants!

CHIGI

(embarrassed) Good evening. I hope I'm not disturbing. I happened to be out... and...

BEATRICE

Alas, we have nothing to give you, not even an olive!

CHIGI

I require nothing! *(disconcerted, improvising)* How strange... I seem to have a coin stuck in the sole of my boot.

BEATRICE

Lucky you!

CHIGI

Might you have something with which I could ... dislodge it?

BEATRICE

(laughing) I don't know, I rarely get coins stuck in my boots...

SEBASTIANO

(holding out a butter knife) You want a knife?

CHIGI

No no, that might damage the leather! *(beat)* Perhaps... have you got a key lying around, by any chance?

BEATRICE

(mystified) You mean, a house key?

CHIGI

Why not! You know, something with little prongs... but not too sharp...

Beatrice runs her eyes along the counter till she sees her key.

BEATRICE

Here you go ... *(Chigi turns away, hopping around on one foot. Beatrice and Sebastiano exchange glances, amused. By some elaborate maneuver, Chigi pretends to scrape a gold coin out of his boot.)*

CHIGI

Success! *(he stands still, embarrassed)* Many thanks, Madame. In exchange for your help, let me present you with a gold coin from the streets of Rome. To bring you luck. With the baby.

BEATRICE

(looks at Bastiano, who smiles and nods) How kind. Thank you. *(she pockets it. He pockets the key)*

CHIGI

It's the least I can do. *(to Sebastiano)* And you, my friend? How's the mighty Lazarus coming along? Is he rising again?

SEBASTIANO

He's on the way! I've finished everything in the center of the painting except Christ's toes... and you know how tricky toes can be...

CHIGI

Toes? *(to Bea)* He's such an enthusiast, your husband.

BEATRICE

If you think he's enthused about toes, wait till he gets going on my hands!

SEBASTIANO

Doesn't she have exceptional fingers, Agostino?

CHIGI

All her assets are commendable. *(his hands are dirty from his boot—he looks around for a cloth to wipe them and sees the one covering the menorah)* My hands are filthy—may I? *(he takes the cloth. Beneath is the menorah. His eyes light on it. He picks it up)* What is this, may I ask?

BEATRICE

It's a Menorah.

CHIGI

(testy) I know what it is! I meant to say, what is it doing here?

BEATRICE

I found it this afternoon. On one of my walks.

SEBASTIANO

(quickly) She's like an archaeologist, Bea—you never know what she might bring home at the end of the day!

CHIGI

(staring at her hard) Do you use it?

SEBASTIANO

Why would we use it?

BEATRICE

I'm not sure how. Otherwise, I might.

SEBASTIANO

(panicked) Bea! *(smiling at Chigi)* My wife is a poet, Agostino. She has an active imagination!

CHIGI

(drily) So I see.

SEBASTIANO

(panicking) May I offer you a drink? Something to nibble?

CHIGI

Not tonight. 'Cesca is waiting for me at home. And you know what they say...

BEATRICE

No. What do they say?

CHIGI

Never put off till tomorrow what you can enjoy tonight.

SEBASTIANO

(laughing) Indeed. Nicely put! Well then, let me see you out. *(Chigi bows to Beatrice, who smiles back. He exits. When he's gone, Beatrice peers through the shutters to make sure he's gone. Sebastiano returns)*

SEBASTIANO

What on earth...? *(he picks up the menorah)*

BEATRICE

What an annoying man! How do you stand him?

SEBASTIANO

He's my biggest patron. He gave us a gold coin! What is this doing here? *(he holds the menorah)*

BEATRICE

I found it lying in a gutter. *(imitating Bastiano)* "May I offer you a drink? Something to nibble?" You're crazy! *(laughing)* Aren't we lucky he said no?

SEBASTIANO

Sometimes I think you're *trying* to get us in trouble! We mustn't make waves...

BEATRICE

The waves are there whether we make them or not, sweetheart. Every morning more homeless people have pitched their tents along the Tiber. And what does the Pope do? He stages another parade. Some day soon, the whole house of cards is going to come down. And it's not just me who's saying so.

SEBASTIANO

(urgently) Then let's just do our work and enjoy our lives. *(putting the tomatoes in a pan with the onions and basil)* Okay! Pasta sauce in half an hour.

BEATRICE

And when the Pope is driven out of the Vatican? Whose side do you want to be on?

SEBASTIANO

The side of God! *(quick change of subject)* Oh, speaking of God-- Michelangelo has agreed to be godfather to our child!

BEATRICE

(surprised) Seriously?

SEBASTIANO

He was extremely honored—he said no one had ever asked such a thing of him before.

BEATRICE

(laughing) Well, I'm sure *that's* true. Our poor baby—can you imagine having such a godfather?

SEBASTIANO

The poor man—he grew up in a *quarry*. What can he do? He's only at home with stone. He won't take pupils, or assistants—he doesn't have a single friend. Except us. *(he empties the last of the wine into a glass for her)* Have the last drop of wine, my love. Dinner won't be long. *(there's a knock on the door)* Is that Chigi again? You think he found another coin? *(another knock)*

RAPHAEL

Bastiano? *(beat)* Is anyone home?

SEBASTIANO

(shocked) That sounds like Raphael.

BEATRICE

The whole world is out walking tonight! I'll go! Watch what you say. *(she quickly fixes her hair. More knocking. She rushes to the door. Voices off. She returns, leading him in)*

SEBASTIANO

My goodness! To what do we owe the pleasure...

RAPHAEL

I was passing by... and my eye was arrested by your basil plant outside...

SEBASTIANO

What is it about our basil plant that's so arresting?! Chigi just stopped by, saying the same thing.

RAPHAEL

Oh yes? And did he... *(he stops himself)* Well, I guess no one can stay away from a beautiful woman. *(sniffing)* I smell dinner!

BEATRICE

We have nothing to offer you. *(Sebastiano grabs her un-drunk glass of wine)*

SEBASTIANO

On the contrary! Have a glass of wine!

RAPHAEL

(Raphael takes it, amused. Drains it in one gulp) How kind. *(smiles and hands back the glass)* If I'd known you were in, I'd have brought some of my own... the vines from Urbino have had spectacular results this year!

SEBASTIANO

Next time. Sit down! Make yourself comfortable! Why do we never see you?

RAPHAEL

"We" who? Everyone sees me.

SEBASTIANO

But you used to visit us—we used to eat figs together and gossip about Rome.

RAPHAEL

We did, didn't we? Alas, where are the figs of yesteryear? *(he laughs)* There's no time!

SEBASTIANO

True.

RAPHAEL

Life is nothing but trivialities. I spend all day showing my assistants how to put tiny leaves on the cypress trees behind my Madonnas. For this we became artists?!

BEATRICE

Then why don't you paint something else? Something that matters.

SEBASTIANO

Bea...

RAPHAEL

(eyeing her with surprise) In difficult times, people need beauty, don't you think?

BEATRICE

Not really. I think they need the truth.

RAPHAEL

Beauty is more important than truth. That's why we're artists.

BEATRICE

Or are you just scared the truth will scare away your donors?

RAPHAEL

(laughing) That too! *(beat. Charmingly)* I understand you write poetry. I am always on the lookout for verses to inspire me. Have you thought about a nom de plume?

SEBASTIANO

A what?

RAPHAEL

(to Beatrice) Fool the world into believing you're a brilliant young man, and soon everyone will be reading your work.

BEATRICE

The Marchioness of Pescara signs her own poems, and the Pope knows them by heart.

RAPHAEL

Then we must make sure the same happens to you! Shall we introduce your wife to the literary circles at the Vatican, Bastiano?

SEBASTIANO

Of course! What a friend you are! How can we ever thank you?

BEATRICE

There aren't enough hours in the day.

SEBASTIANO

That's what's depressing about Rome, don't you think? In Venice, there was always time for a drink, a *passeggiata* with friends, a family visit—here no one ever has time for conversation!

BEATRICE

Excuse me?

RAPHAEL

Bea's right. Here you have Michelangelo.

SEBASTIANO

Well, he's not exactly *chatty*...

RAPHAEL

But I understand he is making a magnificent contribution to your Lazarus commission!

SEBASTIANO

That's true! Wait till it's done! He's at it day and night.

RAPHAEL

May one see? (*Beatrice throws a severe look at Sebastiano, to shut him up*)

SEBASTIANO

No. I mean, not yet. I don't have the drawing with me-- he carries it with him wherever he goes.

RAPHAEL

(*disappointed*) Ah. How unfortunate.

SEBASTIANO

Indeed. (*making a joke*) All I've got is a hole in the painting where the figure is going to be...

RAPHAEL

I see. (*beat*) May one see the hole?

SEBASTIANO

(*pleased*) You mean, what's around it? Would you like to?

BEATRICE

Bastiano. Don't be stupid.

RAPHAEL

(*laughing*) Your wife thinks I'm going to steal from you.

BEATRICE

I know it.

SEBASTIANO

Nonsense! She understands what friends we are. Come inside and see. I've done some Apostles you'll love, and three women holding their noses!

RAPHAEL

(smiling) It sounds like a play!

SEBASTIANO

Martha's in blue and orange, recoiling in awe from the miracle, like this! *(he demonstrates)* And in the center is Lazarus' sister Mary, in yellow, falling to her knees and looking up at Christ. Bea modeled for me. Look at her fingers!

RAPHAEL

How blessed you are to have a model in your own home. I wish you'd lend her to me.

SEBASTIANO

(laughing nervously) To you? For what?

RAPHAEL

To pose for my Transfiguration...

SEBASTIANO

But she's—

BEATRICE

(interrupting quickly) I would love to, Raffaello. You know that I'm an inspiring muse.

RAPHAEL

(beat. He eyes her) Of course I already promised Chigi that his 'Cesca could be Mary Magdalene, but I'm sure we could find something juicy for you...

BEATRICE

Trust me. I can transfigure with the best of them.

RAPHAEL

I'll bet you can! Shall I make you a disciple?

BEATRICE

Which one?

RAPHAEL

Hard to say—none is young and beautiful enough to do you justice.

SEBASTIANO

Raffaello!

RAPHAEL

My Transfiguration is going to be highly original. Once I get it started...

BEATRICE

How much would you pay?

RAPHAEL

Whatever it takes to make inspiration strike. Come to my rooms tomorrow at sunset, and we'll make arrangements...

BEATRICE

Why sunset?

RAPHAEL

That's when Jesus transfigures. *(he smiles. To Bastiano)* After you.

Sebastiano leads Raphael off. Beatrice is left in the room. She stirs the pasta sauce distractedly. Michelangelo enters, using his key.

BEATRICE

Oh! Hello.

MICHELANGELO

Forgive me! I just came by to ask Bastiano for some help--

BEATRICE

He's inside. With -- *(thinking fast, whispering)* -- a potential patron.

MICHELANGELO

I'll come back-- *(he turns to go)*

BEATRICE

(quickly) How's our Lazarus?

MICHELANGELO

Inert. *(he sighs)* What can I say? I can't seem to blow life into him ...

BEATRICE

Have faith. *(Sebastiano calls from offstage)*

SEBASTIANO

Bea! Come here a minute! I want to show him how you posed!

BEATRICE

(calling) Coming! *(she turns to Michelangelo)* This donor loves my hands...

MICHELANGELO

They're very... *(beat)* Yes. I can see why.

BEATRICE

(on an impulse) May I ask— *(she stops herself. Starts over)* That wasn't you I saw this afternoon, was it? Near the Ghetto? The light was bad but—

MICHELANGELO

(quickly) Yes.

BEATRICE

(startled) I thought so. How strange. *(beat)* What were you doing there?

MICHELANGELO

Looking for a model.

BEATRICE

Among the Jews?

SEBASTIANO

(calling) Bea!

MICHELANGELO

Why not? Lazarus was a Jew.

BEATRICE

Of course. *(beat)* Did you find him? *(Michelangelo shakes his head. She calls out)* One sec! *(getting close to Michelangelo for a moment)* Try the docks. I saw men being led off a ship in the Tiber today, with eyes that would break your heart...

MICHELANGELO

He's calling for you. *(she exits. He stares after her.)*

Crossfade to the Cardinal's rooms. The Cardinal is in a dressing gown, with his Cardinal's ecclesiastical robes and accoutrements hanging on an elegant rack beside him. Chigi stands across from him; he's just arrived.

CARDINAL

Where have you been? I've been calling for you all morning.

CHIGI

(stressed) Forgive me. I do have a day job, Your Excellency.

CARDINAL

Let someone else run the bank.

CHIGI

There are some financial issues...

CARDINAL

(interrupting) What happened? Did you make a bad loan? Lose your salt franchise?

CHIGI

A ship is missing at sea...

CARDINAL

It'll turn up, they always do. *(beat)* So. Is it true?

CHIGI

Is what true?

CARDINAL

That there was a raid on Michelangelo's rooms last night? That the police broke in and discovered a roomful of young men in various states of undress?

CHIGI

Not a roomful of men. One man. One man totally undressed.

CARDINAL

A model? Or a lover?

CHIGI

Hard to say. He was standing naked in the window. At around midnight. Fully lit from behind. That's when the police decided to pay them a visit.

CARDINAL

How do you know?

CHIGI

I went to have a look. It was quite a sight.

CARDINAL

I'm sure. *(Calling out)* Danilo! I am ready to be dressed for Mass! *(he slips off his robe and stands on a low platform, awaiting the Young Monk)* What were they doing up there? Will I have to arrest them?

CHIGI

From what I could gather, they were playing "Lazarus".

CARDINAL

How do you mean, "Lazarus"? What does Michelangelo have to do with— *(he stops)* Please don't tell me—

CHIGI

I'm afraid so. Our competition is no longer a duo, it's a *trio*, Your Eminence. Michelangelo has joined the fray.

CARDINAL

(shocked) What? Why?

CHIGI

He's helping Bastiano. Just with the main figure. *(the Cardinal's face hardens)* Forgive me. I couldn't stop it. They've done this before.

CARDINAL

Does Raphael know?

CHIGI

He's incensed.

CARDINAL

(eagerly) Really? Good!

CHIGI

He wants to break into their studio and steal what they've got.

CARDINAL

Even better! They're more venal than I'd hoped. Maybe this was meant to be!

CHIGI

I'm stirring the pot, Eminence. Pitting their egos against each other, arousing their worst instincts, inciting those narcissists to compete. *(smiling)* I hope you'll remember me when you become Pope.

The Young Monk comes in, covered in a cowl.

MONK

Your Eminence. *(he kneels, kisses the Cardinal's ring)*

CARDINAL

Salve, Frate.

MONK

Salve, Cardinale.

CARDINAL

You may begin, Danilo. *(he sips. Puts his arms over his head for the cassock to go on. The Monk lifts the cassock and slips it over the Cardinal's head as Chigi talks)* Of

course I'll remember you—how could I not! Go on. Tell me more about the naked Lazarus ...

CHIGI

He was all tied up, with ropes and winding cloths—and Michelangelo was trying to set him free.

CARDINAL

How dramatic! Was he an actor?

CHIGI

Who knows-- I never go to the theater. *(the Cardinal puts his arms out. The Monk ties his sash)* He was certainly... dark.

CARDINAL

Dark?

CHIGI

The lighting was bad. But even so...

CARDINAL

Michelangelo's been obsessed since he started sculpting those Prisoners in Florence... you know the ones... trying to break free of the stone... *(to the Monk, angrily)* Not so tight! Are you trying to choke me? *(the Monk loosens the sash)* La cotta! *(The Cardinal raises his arms again. The Monk places the cotta, a thigh-length white lace vestment, over his head and over the cassock)* What does any of this have to do with Lazarus?

CHIGI

Good question. They're all the rage these days, Africans. I don't know a household in Rome that doesn't have at least one as a servant.

CARDINAL

The Pope loves them — he calls them "the children of Ham". *(to Danilo)* La mozzetta! *(The Young Monk reaches for a short red cape or mozzetta which goes over the cotta. He places it over the Cardinal's head)*

CHIGI

But surely you're not going to permit Michelangelo to paint a ...dark Lazarus?

CARDINAL

Let's hope it's a *metaphor*. Lazarus as a prisoner of death, being liberated by the word of Jesus to rejoin the human race! I'm sure the figure won't *actually* be black. Michelangelo's complicated. But he's not crazy. And Bastiano would never permit it—he wants to be paid.

CHIGI

He's *already* asking for more money! He feels the fee is too low, given that he's painting forty figures!

CARDINAL

(To the Monk) La mozzetta! (The Monk reaches for a short red cape or mozzetta which goes over the cotta. He places it over the cardinal's head) We're not paying by the yard, Chigi. That's absurd!

CHIGI

He has a very demanding wife. I'm not sure I trust her.

CARDINAL

Why not? *(to the Monk) Il zucchetto! Hurry up! (The Monk scurries to get the skullcap and place it on the Cardinal's head)*

CHIGI

And now that Michelangelo's involved with the Lazarus...

CARDINAL

Are you implying -- don't tell me Michelangelo will dare to ask for a payout as well! After what we went through at the Sistine? Those months of delay—the Pope nearly had a stroke! *(to the Monk) La biretta! (His hat is placed over the skullcap. Agitated)* It's enough! I spend my life funding these rapacious men—I refuse to put up with their greed and ingratitude! To say nothing of their demanding wives! *(to the Monk)* And finally, my cross. *(The pectoral cross is placed around his neck. The Monk steps back to survey the Cardinal. The dressing is now complete. His costumed presence is quite an astonishing sight. The Monk moves the mirror so the Cardinal can view himself. The Cardinal smiles)* Excellent. Bless you, Danilo. You may go. *(Danilo bows and scurries out of the room. The Cardinal turns back to Chigi)* I suggest you remind our august competitors—all three of them—to stop messing around with break-ins and play enactments. We need two major masterpieces by the new year or there will be hell to pay.

CHIGI

I'm doing my best, Your Eminence.

CARDINAL

(raging) And I'm talking about the *real* Hell! Meaning exile, poverty and humiliation! No more commissions and no financial support from the Church, *ever again!* *(raising his right hand)* In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

CHIGI

Amen. (*Crossfade back to Bastiano and Beatrice*)

SEBASTIANO

It's humiliating. I don't want it.

BEATRICE

It's *money*, sweetheart! Money for the baby. I'll be completely covered, don't worry—not even my breasts will show.

SEBASTIANO

Your breasts are *mine*... I want no one else to see them...

BEATRICE

Actually, my breasts are *mine*. And once I'm in his studio, I'll get to spy on his painting! Aren't you curious what you're competing with?

SEBASTIANO

That's cheating—we're not supposed to know—

BEATRICE

We're not supposed to starve either. He saw *your* painting, after all. If you win this one, you'll have commissions for years to come. We'll be able to move into a big house, like Raphael—with tapestries – and a proper kitchen!

SEBASTIANO

I can't leave you alone with that man and a bed sheet.

BEATRICE

A bed sheet? Knowing Raphael, his characters will be dressed in the most expensive velvet and lace. (*smiling*) I'll be a highly subversive muse, I promise.

SEBASTIANO

Even so.

BEATRICE

Please. I want to see what he's up to. And he pays fabulously.

SEBASTIANO

I'll support the baby, why do you always doubt me?

BEATRICE

I want to support her! I want to do something other than just carry her around in my belly!

SEBASTIANO

Why are you so sure it's a *her*?

BEATRICE

It has to be! She's going to be fierce and funny, she'll speak three languages and dance barefoot in the streets, just like my grandmother!

SEBASTIANO

Your grandmother danced barefoot in the streets?

BEATRICE

She was Spanish. You knew that.

SEBASTIANO

I must have forgotten.

BEATRICE

Don't you read my poems when I give them to you? (*she recites*)
"In a swirl of color and castanets
A woman is spinning like a magic lantern across the square
Flashes of color blinding the eyes
Of passersby
As she disappears down an alleyway
Leaving only her scent behind,
Floating in the air like mist..."

SEBASTIANO

How wonderful! (*he smiles at her*) Shall I make a painting of you spinning around with a rose between your teeth?

BEATRICE

Paint this: when my grandmother got to Venice as a young woman, she was in hiding. My grandfather came to repair a cupboard and found her inside. That was her favorite story.

SEBASTIANO

What was she in hiding from?

BEATRICE

I never knew. Maybe an affair with a Spanish nobleman. (*whispering*) Or maybe the Inquisition!

SEBASTIANO

(*quickly*) Don't. Please. What has gotten into you lately?

BEATRICE

I'm just trying to figure things out.

SEBASTIANO

(anxiously) What good does that do? Stop walking past the Ghetto and getting ridiculous ideas in your head—I beg you. No more menorahs. And no more offering your services to rival painters. It's embarrassing. You have to trust me. I will win this thing on my own.

Crossfade back to the Cardinal's rooms. The Cardinal has just finished giving Mass, splendidly dressed. Raphael is showing him a drawing that features the boy for the first time.

CARDINAL

(staring at the drawing, dumbfounded) You think this is how you're going to win?

RAPHAEL

It's an idea.

CARDINAL

Who is this awful boy? He looks deranged. Breakfast?

RAPHAEL

No thanks. I've eaten. *(about the drawing)* Your Eminence... I wondered if you'd consider a slight... change in subject.

CARDINAL

What are you talking about?

RAPHAEL

I understand you and the Pope are longing for a Transfiguration and of course I appreciate the immense value of that story—but –

CARDINAL

But what?

RAPHAEL

I'm not inspired.

CARDINAL

Five hundred ducats have not inspired you?

RAPHAEL

(brazenly) Would you consider a "Last Judgment" instead?

CARDINAL

(furious) No! You just want to get your hands on the empty wall of the Sistine, don't you?

RAPHAEL

(reassuringly) No no, I surrender the Sistine to Michelangelo. *(beat)* It's just that-- a sudden idea came to me last night—something that would make a remarkable painting.

CARDINAL

Then employ it somewhere else. You were chosen for this commission because your work is *harmonious* and your women have beautiful breasts.

RAPHAEL

I'm honored you think so. *(he shows him the drawing)* Just take a look.

CARDINAL

(staring in disgust at the drawing) Who is this cretin? Why is he punching his fist in the air and showing us his buttocks?

RAPHAEL

I had a vision! I was standing outside Michelangelo's door the other night at dusk.

CARDINAL

You and half of Rome, from what I could tell... I'm surprised Chigi didn't sell tickets.

RAPHAEL

The moon was rising. I had just taken a sip of brandy from my flask when suddenly, a strange young man arrives! Tall, muscular, a foreigner from the looks of him—he bends down, picks up a stone, and throws it at Michelangelo's window. Michelangelo leaned out to see him, with his hair blowing and wild. The boy looked up and raised his arm in greeting. Michelangelo's eyes were calm. His hands were raised. This wasn't about sex. He was imagining something, I could tell.

CARDINAL

And the point is...?

RAPHAEL

It reminded me what art can do, Your Eminence. It can lift up our eyes and transform the quotidian world into something entirely new. In a flash that filthy man was flooded with the light of God!

CARDINAL

Was it the moon? We need a moon!

RAPHAEL

It was the light of divine grace! The image of that boy looking up at Michelangelo with such hope -- it could be the beginning of a stunning Last Judgment. As soon as he went upstairs, I ran home to make this sketch. While it was still fresh in my mind.

CARDINAL

(firmly) Forget it. We can't send Narbonne a Last Judgment.

RAPHAEL

Why not?

CARDINAL

We're meant to be celebrating their victory over the Saracens, not talking about the end of the world! They'll be furious. You'll have to use this boy in some other way. God knows how. He looks like he's trying to start a revolution.

RAPHAEL

Maybe he is!

CARDINAL

(getting hysterical) Don't say that. Don't you dare. The Pope is in a panic about reformation. It's getting worse every day!

Michelangelo and Sebastiano in Bastiano's rooms. Michelangelo is in a rage.

MICHELANGELO

He was here! That sniveling bastard was *here*, Bastiano! I know it!

BASTIANO

It's not possible! The windows were locked. The hidden key was on the ledge, where I left it.

MICHELANGELO

You have betrayed me.

SEBASTIANO

Never!

MICHELANGELO

Then how do you explain it? Chigi described Raphael's new renderings for his Apostles—Peter down left, in blue, with his hands like so *(he raises his hands in shock)*, James twisting away in red—we've been robbed, Bastiano! Wake up!

BASTIANO

(soothingly) The Apostles are the Apostles! How different can they be? Peter is always in blue, with his hands “like so”! *(repeating the gesture)* I showed them to Raphael myself!

MICHELANGELO

(shocked at the news) That’s it—you’re impossible. I’m done. *(he starts to exit)*

SEBASTIANO

No! I’ve been waiting for you for *days*—where have you been? *(Beatrice enters)*

MICHELANGELO

(stopping) Up in my rooms. Agonizing.

BEATRICE

Agonizing! What did I miss?

SEBASTIANO

A new Lazarus. *(to Michelangelo)* Calm down. We’re all eyes. Show us what you’ve come up with. *(Michelangelo hesitates, then produces a new drawing. It is the twisted Lazarus, his right arm crossed over his chest, grabbing his shroud. The three stare at it, in silence. Crossfade to Raphael and Chigi)*

RAPHAEL

(quickly) I didn’t mean revolution. The idea is just-- a young man rising back onto his feet after being left for dead--

CARDINAL

That’s *Lazarus*! Sebastiano’s taking care of that one!

RAPHAEL

Then let me paint something complementary—to be placed next to Lazarus on the altarpiece! You’re the man of God—there must be another story I could explore—one that might feature this boy...?

CARDINAL

(firmly) You’re doing the Transfiguration. End of discussion. It’s what Leo asked for and it’s your job to deliver it. If you want to weave this... *boy* into the fabric of the painting... well... you’re the artist, not me. By the way, Chigi is counting on you to include his girlfriend somewhere—and you know he’s writing the checks...

RAPHAEL

'Cesca will be front and center, I promise! Ass to the audience!

CARDINAL

Not nude, I hope?

RAPHAEL

In a diaphanous pink robe. A sort of serpentine figure, twisting away from the Boy. That way I get her left profile. She has an exquisite little mole on her left temple. I also plan to show her perfect left toe... and beneath the robes—her absolutely delightful shape--

CARDINAL

(interrupting) That's enough! Chigi will be delighted, I'm sure. (*returning to the subject at hand*) Bear in mind-- the story is the *transfiguration of Jesus*, not the buttocks of Francesca or the agony of some vagrant boy. When people buy a Raphael, they want a Raphael. Don't disappoint them.

RAPHAEL

I'm disappointing *myself*, which is even worse.

CHIGI

You'd better hide that crazy boy till you've figured out what story you're telling. Go home and read the rest of Bible. Cover to cover. Till you come across a naked boy screaming at the sky. And then paint that. (*he sighs*) Dear God, why did we ever launch this competition?

Meanwhile, back at Sebastiano's studio, Michelangelo, Beatrice and Bastiano are staring at the new drawing.

MICHELANGELO

Tell me what you think.

BEATRICE

Did you find him on a boat? As I suggested?

SEBASTIANO

A boat?

MICHELANGELO

(*evading the question*) He came up to my rooms. It was late, the sky was full of stars. I opened the window, and took off his clothes.

SEBASTIANO

(*demurring*) Michele...

MICHELANGELO

It was for art! I had a premonition. I sat him in a chair by the window, tore up my bed sheets, and tied him up.

BEATRICE

Tied him up? How awful.

MICHELANGELO

Yes. Awful, and beautiful. Awful because he remembered exactly what it felt like to be chained... and beautiful because he knew this time he'd be set free.

SEBASTIANO

Don't you think that's a little... manipulative?

MICHELANGELO

(obsessively) I wanted to watch how his body behaved when it was chained.

BEATRICE

(to Bastiano) You see what I mean? When will some muse finally say *no*?

MICHELANGELO

Why would he say no?

BEATRICE

(bursting out) Because it's bad enough having been chained up on a *boat*, no one needs to get chained up again for a *painting*! No matter how useful you might find that! Couldn't you just use your imagination for a change? Isn't that what it means to be an artist? *(Michelangelo stares at her, slightly shocked. Bastiano is embarrassed)*

SEBASTIANO

It's always better to draw from life... you know that.

BEATRICE

Is it? Better for whom?

MICHELANGELO

For me. I needed to see the event in front of me... to think about it one step at a time. Lazarus has been silenced, right? Buried in the tomb of death for days and days. Suddenly he receives a spark, an invitation to life, from Christ's pointing finger. He feels it, but he doesn't move. Not yet. He sits, still partly bound. He twists. He reaches for his left arm, where the binding has been hurting his shoulder. He opens his eyes wide. He stares at Christ in amazement. He asks, is it true? Have you given me a second chance? Should I take it? Slowly, the blood starts moving through his body. Can you see the right toe, pushing the cloth away from his left knee? That's where it begins. The sense memory. He flexes his muscles. He begins to remember what it felt like to be alive. To long for love. To want to be *heard*. To be recognized. Because in

the end, that's the question the painting must ask. Christ can open the door, but Lazarus has to choose to walk through it. *(beat)* Does it work? *(to Beatrice)* Or do you think I am without imagination?

BEATRICE

I think your model is an absolute genius. *(she smiles and exits. Michelangelo turns to Sebastiano, who is fixated on the drawing)*

SEBASTIANO

You're the genius. This is something completely different. I mean... it looks like a real man, not a metaphor. *(Michelangelo nods. Sebastiano is a little chagrined)* Good for you for keeping at it. I mean, *(laughing nervously)* knowing me, I would've just settled for what we had. *(beat)* Does that make me a fool?

MICHELANGELO

(shrugging) You're trying to keep a roof over your head.

SEBASTIANO

(humiliated) Maybe I'm just a hack!

MICHELANGELO

Maybe we're all just hacks. *(beat)* But sometimes, Bastiano—*(beat)* There are times when – to get what you want-- you have to be willing to do what it takes.

SEBASTIANO

Like tie your model to a chair? Is that what it takes? *(beat)* Sometimes I think I'm not an artist after all.

MICHELANGELO

I'm just saying... people who follow others never pass them by.

SEBASTIANO

(stung) Is that the goal? To pass people by?

MICHELANGELO

The goal is to paint the truth.

SEBASTIANO

Which truth?

MICHELANGELO

(beat. He has no idea how to respond) Let's just see if the figure fits. *(they place the drawing on a larger "cartoon" of the whole painting)*

In another part of the stage, in Raphael's studio, BEATRICE is swathed in sheets. Her wild red curls blow in a breeze from the window. Raphael is drawing her, experimenting with various poses.

RAPHAEL

How beautiful you are! Raise your arms!

BEATRICE

Who am I supposed to be?

RAPHAEL

I have no idea! Just relax and let's play a little...

BEATRICE

Are you going to paint my face? Or just my body?

RAPHAEL

I haven't decided. Truth be told, I'm still exploring the story of this painting.

BEATRICE

It's the Transfiguration!

RAPHAEL

I know. But there's always room for invention... *(he grins)* Bastiano says you inspire all his best work. So, talk to me. If you could be anyone in a massive new Raphael painting... who would you like to be?

BEATRICE

What's my choice?

RAPHAEL

(sketching) Are you a gorgeous courtier in a fabulous gown, standing next to Jesus?

BEATRICE

No. Definitely not.

RAPHAEL

How about Mary Magdalene's sister?

BEATRICE

Her sister? I don't think so. *(on an impulse)* How about making me Jesus?

RAPHAEL

What?

BEATRICE

It's the Transfiguration! I know what it is to have a vision no one believes in—

RAPHAEL

Jesus doesn't have a vision no one believes in!

BEATRICE

Of course he does. And I write poems no one reads. Which is why I'd make a heartbreaking Jesus.

RAPHAEL

You'd have to demonstrate how you exercise divine patience while you float around!

BEATRICE

Divine patience is my specialty. Watch. *(she poses with her arms raised, looking up patiently at the sky. Something captures Raphael's imagination)*

RAPHAEL

Hold that pose. *(he starts to draw)* Can you bend a little at the hips, so we get a nice twist? Permit me... the fabric must fall like so... *(He re-shapes the folds of cloth across her body, until his hands reach her belly. She pulls away)* What?! *(amazed, he touches her belly again. She looks away)* My goodness! You secretive minx. Are you...?

BEATRICE

Why not?

RAPHAEL

Congratulations. I think. *(beat)* Is it Bastiano's?

BEATRICE

Of course!

RAPHAEL

He doesn't deserve you.

BEATRICE

Bite your tongue.

RAPHAEL

Imagine! Not only a female Jesus, but a pregnant Jesus!

BEATRICE

I'm sorry. I didn't think it would show.

RAPHAEL

It's brilliant! Has a painter ever conceived of such a thing?

BEATRICE

No one needs to know. Cover it up and keep drawing.

RAPHAEL

On the contrary! It's incredibly original!

BEATRICE

(surprised) You think so?

RAPHAEL

(suddenly full of energy) Don't you see? The story seemed so dull! Every Jesus I drew was pseudo-Michelangelo, full of muscles and testosterone. Never in a million years did I think of using a *female mode* for Jesus! Let alone a *pregnant* one.

BEATRICE

A pregnant female poet. It could give a whole new meaning to the word "transfiguration"!

RAPHAEL

I will reveal your belly, subtly bulging under the cloth—your beautiful soft hips supporting it...

BEATRICE

And my beautiful mind?

RAPHAEL

(distracted, drawing) You are so full of grace.

BEATRICE

Most of the time, I'm full of rage.

RAPHAEL

Then give me rage! Whatever you like! *(drawing frenetically)* Jesus' body will be pregnant with the future... about to give birth to the Holy Catholic Church. That's it! Why has no one done this before?

BEATRICE

Because they never had the right muse. *(excited)* If I'm going to be Jesus, let me be Jesus. Let's try to imagine what he's feeling.

RAPHAEL

Be my guest...

BEATRICE

Here we go. *(she starts to imagine, he keeps drawing)* He's about to leave his whole past behind, right? *(she thinking)* A young Jewish man, up on a mountaintop with his disciples, about to become-- what? What's in his mind? Does he know he's leaving his family behind forever? His entire heritage? Is he terrified? Exhilarated? Full of self-doubt? Does he have any idea of the scale of what's happening? *(she fills the pose with her thoughts. Raphael watches, fascinated. Crossfade back to Sebastiano and Michelangelo)*

SEBASTIANO

By the way, I'm a little worried about the scale. Should Lazarus be so much bigger than *Christ*? The Pope may not like that.

MICHELANGELO

What Christ lacks in stature, you will make up for in light. *(softening)* Relax, Bastiano. You're the best colorist I know.

SEBASTIANO

Thank you, Michele.

MICHELANGELO

We'll be revealing the scale of the miracle—a prisoner being magically set free.

BEATRICE

Does he feel *free*, the Son of God?

RAPHAEL

(getting into the game) Or is he trapped by his new responsibilities?

BEATRICE

Maybe he feels absolutely calm. As if -- suddenly and unexpectedly—he realizes what He's good at!

RAPHAEL

How lucky for him!

BEATRICE

It's not luck. Think about it! Jesus has been working eighteen-hour days, travelling through the hot desert, performing miracles, curing the sick, making loaves and fishes appear out of nowhere—he's exhausted! And in despair. He wonders, when are those people down there ever going to believe I'm the Son of God?

RAPHAEL

Exactly!

BEATRICE

And just when he thinks he can't take anymore, God the Father makes him slog up a mountain with all his disciples following behind him, like some kind of crazy parade... and then suddenly— (*she raises her arms*)—I'm there. At the top. Looking out at the vast universe—

RAPHAEL

A night sky full of stars—

BEATRICE

--and I hear a voice rumbling in the air. The voice of God. Telling the world: "This is my son! Behold him in all his glory! With him, I am well pleased!" And a flash of glorious light illuminates my flowing hair (*she shakes out her mane*) and all the disciples collapse in amazement!

RAPHAEL

Yes! Because the Jesus they're staring at is suddenly like no one they've ever encountered!

BEATRICE

(*raising her arms gracefully to the heavens*) He's a goddess of the future! The eternal female, pregnant with possibilities--

RAPHAEL

Floating on a cloud! Yes! I can see it now! The whole painting in one fell swoop!!

BEATRICE

It's not the whole painting, it's only half, you fool!

RAPHAEL

(*drawing*) Whatever you say! Hold that pose!

BEATRICE

(*posing beautifully*) Jesus is up above, gorgeous and patient. Now you have to figure out what's happening down below.

RAPHAEL

Down below? A crowd of brilliantly painted figures, staring up at you in amazement!

BEATRICE

They can't be staring at me—

RAPHAEL

Why not?

BEATRICE

No one actually *sees* Jesus transfigure, that's the point of the story. They can only feel the power of my divine presence!

RAPHAEL

How do I paint people feeling the power of your divine presence?

BEATRICE

(making it up) Maybe I've just done a miracle!

RAPHAEL

(an idea) Could it involve a beautiful young boy, reaching up to the sky?

BEATRICE

Which boy?

RAPHAEL

I don't know who he is, but I know exactly what he looks like! Don't move -- *(he rushes off to find the drawing he made of Michelangelo's model)*

SEBASTIANO

Can you paint it quickly? I need money for the *baby*, Michele! If we finish this before Raphael finishes his, maybe the Pope will give us a bonus and a new commission!

MICHELANGELO

Get me twenty-five ducats for the paint. Quickly.

SEBASTIANO

What?

MICHELANGELO

It's a large figure. And my model needs to eat.

RAPHAEL

(returning with the drawing) Look! You see?

BEATRICE

He looks like he's starting a revolution!

RAPHAEL

He is! He'll be standing beneath you, with those fabulous arms splayed... sending the presence of Jesus, locus of imagination and joy!

BEATRICE

Imagination and joy! *(feeling her belly)* Then you'll have to raise my fee.

SEBASTIANO

They've already told us the fee—there won't be more—

MICHELANGELO

This is *Lazarus*...

BEATRICE

I'm *Jesus*!

MICHELANGELO

Tearing off the bonds of death and being reborn!

BEATRICE

Transforming the idea of the future of mankind!

MICHELANGELO

This is the victory over the tyranny of death. It's a *miracle*!

BEATRICE

I'm a miracle.

SEBASTIANO

I know, but... twenty-five ducats?

MICHELANGELO

This is how we'll be remembered!

RAPHAEL

This is how your baby will be remembered!

BEATRICE

She'll be remembered for much more than that!

SEBASTIANO

No one knows who will be remembered!

RAPHAEL

My paintings will give us all eternal life!

MICHELANGELO

(*outraged*) What is twenty-five ducats in exchange for *eternal life*?! Get me the money, Bastiano! *Now!* Or Lazarus will never rise again!

BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT 2

Five months later. Beatrice at home in a loose-fitting nightgown, writing/reciting a poem. Like a piece of performance art.

BEATRICE

“Look! Look up, you blind people!
Dance, angels!
Sing out, Voice of the Father!
Fall to the ground, apostles, and cover your eyes!
Do you know me? I am God! I am finally God! It has *happened*! Me!
For this single moment, I am everywhere!
Transitory! Transcendent! Transmuted! Transplanted!
Why do you point but refuse to look?”
(The sound of a baby howling shatters her concentration. She looks up, frazzled)
Bastiano! Get her! She’s screaming!
(reading the poem)
“Why do you point but refuse to look?
Don’t you *believe*? I’m everything you’ve never seen!
I defy logic!
I am the mystery that transfigures!
I am energy that powers the universe!
And you, who believe you see it all,
You who drape fabric
Over my naked breasts”—
(she stops, crosses out a word, tries again)
“Over my naked soul,
Be warned! You cannot take my belly
But avoid my mind!”
(calling out) Bastiano!! (the baby cries)
“I will blind the world with my light”--
(We hear a screaming newborn baby. Sebastiano enters, carrying Luciana)
Hello sweetheart.

SEBASTIANO

I think she’s hungry!

BEATRICE

(distracted) She just ate! How about a walk?

SEBASTIANO

It’s raining! She’ll catch cold. *(he rocks the baby. The baby screams)* What is it, carina?
You sound as if the Devil were trapped inside you! *(He hands the baby to Beatrice)*
Do they always smell like this?

BEATRICE

(rocking her) Ssshhh, angel. Your mamma is working!

SEBASTIANO

If my breasts had milk, I would feed her myself!

Beatrice sticks the baby on her breast and resumes her attention on her poem. There is a moment of silence while the baby feeds and Beatrice writes. Sebastiano grabs his sketchpad and begins to draw her.

SEBASTIANO

One sec-- could you turn a little to the left? And hold her like this... *(he turns her and makes adjustments so he can draw them)* Perfect! Virgin and Child with Breast and Poem! I'll sell this to Chigi for a month's worth of salami!

BEATRICE

(reading loudly while she nurses and performs for Bastiano)

"I will blind the world with my light

Until even *you* believe in me!

Do you see that boy, down below?

He salutes me! *(Bastiano gets involved, raised his fist)*

He pumps his fist in the air

Like a bullfighter in Spain" ... *(he shakes his head, she revises it)*

"Like a dancer in a Papal pageant.

But I look away,

gazing into the distant future

Ignoring all of you with my divine patience ..."

SEBASTIANO

(laughing) Patience? You?!

BEATRICE

Absolutely! "With my divine patience,

As I contemplate my future. *(she looks down at the baby)*

We defy your chaos! *(she lifts Luciana up)*

We jump up! We fly! We float like a Venetian cloud!

Hair lit up in a blaze of fire!" *(looking at Luciana)*

(Well, not you, my bald sweetheart)

"And a thousand eyes stare up at us

Wondering who on earth we are supposed to be!"

SEBASTIANO

Brava! *(a moment of silence while the baby nurses)* It's a miracle.

BEATRICE

What, the poem or the moment of silence?

SEBASTIANO

The whole thing!

BEATRICE

You like it?

SEBASTIANO

I love it. You can nurse a baby, pose for a drawing and write a poem, all at the same time.

BEATRICE

It's called multi-tasking, sweetheart. Women have been doing it since time immemorial.

Crossfade to Chigi's rooms. Evening. Chigi is drinking wine. Raphael has just entered.

CHIGI

I hope you're here to tell me the painting is done, and not to drink my superb Montepulciano.

RAPHAEL

I've finished the Jesus.

CHIGI

And?

RAPHAEL

I think it's... *(he pauses, thinking)* It's the most beautiful Christ you've ever seen.

CHIGI

Thank God. You'd better hurry up. Sebastiano and Michelangelo are rounding the finish line.

RAPHAEL

(nervously) Is the Lazarus completed, then?

CHIGI

It's close! They plan to unveil the painting by Christmas. *(holding out some chocolates)* Chocolate?

RAPHAEL

(shocked) Christmas? But it's already October!

CHIGI

Sebastiano's had his baby. He wants the Lazarus done! While he's got his wife at home with her breasts full of milk, he's desperate to paint some Madonna and Childs – *(pause. Thinks. Corrects)* Madonnas and Children. Anyway, he'll make a fortune. You should see her tits! I bought three drawings of her for my private collection... *(he pops a chocolate into his mouth)* Mmmmmm.....

RAPHAEL

His wife is an accomplished poet, Agostino.

CHIGI

She should shut up and keep nursing. These chocolates! Smuggled in from Spain. You *have* to taste! *(Raphael takes a chocolate)*

RAPHAEL

Thanks. *(beat)* Their painting's not framed yet, is it? Perhaps you could insist the frame be made in France. That would buy me some time!

CHIGI

Michelangelo says *he's* designing the frame himself. And building it here. In Rome.

RAPHAEL

(in horror) No! *(he eats the chocolate)*

CHIGI

Yes. He wants it made to his own exact specifications. Stop dilly-dallying or we'll award the competition to the Lazarus. Aren't they sinful? *(meaning the chocolate)*

RAPHAEL

Outrageous. *(quickly, flattering him)* Come to dinner! At my house! You and the Cardinal. You can take a look at my progress and see for yourselves. And then my cook will make you a delicious capon stuffed with chestnuts...

CHIGI

(rising) You're running out of time, Rafaello.

RAPHAEL

I'm doing the best I can.

CHIGI

Just remember... today's innovation is tomorrow's old news. If you lose, no one will ever look at your painting again.

Crossfade. Sounds of a baby crying. In his rooms, Bastiano is rocking a cradle.

SEBASTIANO

Close your eyes, my angel! Just for a moment. Please. (*the baby cries. Michelangelo enters, stops short when he sees Bastiano with the baby. Watches*) Sssshhh! Does your tummy hurt? Are you bored? You're almost as loud as your mama when she's writing a poem! (*the baby begins to get quiet. He looks up and sees Michelangelo. Smiles*) You're going to be a ferocious muse. And some day your famous godfather will put you at the center of a fresco, and all of Rome will line up to admire you! (*he lifts the baby from the cradle and holds her up*) Good morning, Michele.

MICHELANGELO

Morning. You wanted to speak to me?

SEBASTIANO

I did. (*he hesitates*) Forgive me, she didn't sleep all night. She lives in fear of missing out... (*he goes back to tending the baby. Michelangelo gets out his sketchbook*)

MICHELANGELO

May I? (*Michelangelo starts to draw the two of them in red chalk, quietly. For quite a few moments, he draws and Bastiano entertains the baby. Then Bastiano looks up*) Is it the painting?

SEBASTIANO

The actual design is beautiful, Michele. The shape of the torso... the expression in his eyes, all perfect. But—

MICHELANGELO

But you still find the figure too big.

SEBASTIANO

Too big? No. I can live with the size. (*beat*) It's too dark.

MICHELANGELO

What do you mean?

SEBASTIANO

It wasn't clear in the drawings... I mean, in red chalk, he looked... *normal*...

MICHELANGELO

Normal?

SEBASTIANO

But now that's he's painted-- (*bursting out*) it won't fly, Michele! Narbonne Cathedral will never accept it. Never.

MICHELANGELO

Why not?

SEBASTIANO

(putting the baby back in the cradle) Don't you understand? We accepted this commission! We knew what the rules were! We've already spent the money! We never said—

MICHELANGELO

What? We never said what?

SEBASTIANO

That the model for Lazarus would be a black man!

MICHELANGELO

Ah. *(beat)* He's *morisco*.

SEBASTIANO

What does that mean?

MICHELANGELO

He's from Morocco.

SEBASTIANO

I don't care where he's from. That's not the point of the painting.

MICHELANGELO

You don't think it works? It's the only solution that had any power for me.

SEBASTIANO

All we need to do is add some glaze. To lighten the skin a little. It's a simple fix.

MICHELANGELO

What do you think this is, wallpaper?

SEBASTIANO

I don't understand. What difference does it make to you if he's a little lighter?

MICHELANGELO

What difference does it make to you if he's a little darker?

SEBASTIANO

You always do this! It's bad enough that you had to tie up that poor man for hours to get the drawing right. You always have to push the limits, just to make a point.

MICHELANGELO

It's *not* to make a point! It's to make a painting! A work of art! Something to express what I feel about the story. We'll never triumph over Raphael if we don't try something radical, something important!

SEBASTIANO

We live in difficult times...

MICHELANGELO

Then we should portray the world as we find it! (*he stares at Bastiano*) Doesn't the sight of that man move your heart?

SEBASTIANO

Of course it does. But this isn't about me.

MICHELANGELO

I was trying to visualize the terror of being an outsider, wrenched back from the dead. So I painted Ahmed, a man expelled from Spain for no other reason than his faith—

SEBASTIANO

His faith?

MICHELANGELO

What do you think *moriscos* are?

SEBASTIANO

I have no idea.

MICHELANGELO

They're Spanish Muslims who've been forced to convert to Catholicism--

SEBASTIANO

(*very carefully*) Oh my God, Michele. Please don't tell me our Lazarus is a Muslim.

MICHELANGELO

(*passionately*) A Muslim who was forced from his country ... escaped to Morocco... and was finally taken to Genoa in the bottom of a boat! I found him on the docks of the Tiber.

SEBASTIANO

Listen, it's incredibly sad... his whole situation-- I agree--

MICHELANGELO

I knew you would—you're so empathetic...

SEBASTIANO

But it's impossible. Don't you see? (*beat*) It's different for you. You get to throw as many grenades as you like because everyone knows you're a genius. I don't have that luxury...

MICHELANGELO

Of course you do! You *must*! We're not slaves to the Church!

SEBASTIANO

Actually... we are.

MICHELANGELO

Is it our devout Christian sponsors you're so worried about?

SEBASTIANO

You should be worried too! They were angry enough about the Sistine—this will push them right over the edge.

MICHELANGELO

Then I will fall into the abyss with my head held high.

SEBASTIANO

That's ridiculous! This painting is both of ours. We've worked so hard. Why destroy it now?

MICHELANGELO

I have to go where the painting takes me.

SEBASTIANO

(*angrily*) No you don't! Go somewhere else! There are so many options! So many models! Why did you have to choose that one? They'll excoriate us.

MICHELANGELO

Don't you want to be part of *history*?

SEBASTIANO

I *am* part of history! I have a baby, Michele. As boring as that may seem to you. Luciana's baptismal robes alone cost a fortune—I never realized how expensive it was to procreate.

MICHELANGELO

You should be proud of what we've done.

SEBASTIANO

Who cares how proud I am if the Church turns against us and freezes us out?
(*Michelangelo turns away*) I know you think I'm a coward—and maybe I am! But
you're no better!

MICHELANGELO

Me?

SEBASTIANO

You've been my best friend for twenty years. But you're happy to see me destroyed
for the sake of a painting.

MICHELANGELO

Calm down. No one's getting destroyed.

SEBASTIANO

Hypocrite. Where is the man you love, where is your Tomasso? Disguised in endless
stanzas of verse because you don't have the courage to love him in person!

MICHELANGELO

(*stung*) I love him in my own way—

SEBASTIANO

What way is that? By hiding him inside sculptures of tortured young men? By
writing poems to an unnamed person? You think you can muscle your way into
control no matter what! But you can't. Your love may make you the better artist, but
what kind of *man* does it make you?

MICHELANGELO

Who cares what kind of man I am?

SEBASTIANO

You should care! I know it's difficult for you, acting like a human being-- but you
don't even *try*! You wear your selfishness like a badge. Bea's right, your muses
should revolt, the way you treat them!

MICHELANGELO

Nothing survives but the work itself.

SEBASTIANO

Coward. What's the worst that can happen? Having a relationship is like making a
painting with no sketch to guide you—you have to follow your nose and trust that
you'll find it.

MICHELANGELO

I *have* found it. The painting is what I want to say about Lazarus.

SEBASTIANO

That he's a Muslim slave? He's *not*! Read the Bible story! He's just an ordinary guy who died. A grateful man chosen by Christ for one of the greatest miracles that ever happened. The painting should give viewers *hope*. It should make them believe! That's what the Church is paying us for. Not for your self-indulgent exhibitionism! *(The baby starts to cry. Beatrice enters. She senses the tension in the room).*

BEATRICE

Is everything okay? *(she takes the baby out of the cradle. Rocks her. Picks up Michelangelo's sketch and stares at it)* What a wonderful likeness. Father and child.

MICHELANGELO

(to Sebastiano) My Lazarus works. It fits the painting. I beg you to reconsider.

SEBASTIANO

I beg you to repaint it.

MICHELANGELO

I can't. *(beat)* I wouldn't know how else to do it.

BEATRICE

What's happened? Tell me.

SEBASTIANO

(to Beatrice) We're going to be eating potatoes this winter.

MICHELANGELO

That's not true!

BEATRICE

Potatoes? Why?

SEBASTIANO

(to Michelangelo) Are we done here? I'll see you out. *(Michelangelo hesitates, then turns to go. Sebastiano follows him. Beatrice, still holding the drawing, crosses Luciana and shows her the drawing)*

BEATRICE

Look, sweetheart! Look what Michelangelo drew of you and Papa. Soon you'll be modelling as the baby Jesus ... *(she kisses the baby. Stares at her. Picks up a pen and starts to write something on the back of the drawing. A knock on the door. She keeps writing. Another knock. She looks up)* Who is it? *(Raphael enters. He's disheveled, not himself)*

RAPHAEL

It's me.

BEATRICE

You! *(she stares at him, puts down the drawing)* You look terrible.

RAPHAEL

Late night. I brought you a gift. *(he holds out a capon, already cooked, wrapped in a dish cloth)* A capon. Stuffed with chestnuts. *(beat. She stares at him)*

BEATRICE

Why?

RAPHAEL

I don't know. For dinner.

BEATRICE

Well, at least it's not potatoes. What's the matter?

RAPHAEL

I need help.

BEATRICE

With what?

RAPHAEL

I tried to make it fit. My drawing of the boy. I can't do it.

BEATRICE

(laughing) Eternal life is eluding you?

RAPHAEL

I can't make it cohere with what's on top!

BEATRICE

I'm just the pregnant muse, remember?

RAPHAEL

Don't say that. Could you come to my studio for a little while?

BEATRICE

No. I'm busy. *(she lifts Luciana out of her basket)* Look who was born last month! Jesus' baby!

RAPHAEL

Congratulations! She's... tiny. *(beat)* Forgive me. I haven't slept in days.

BEATRICE

(smiling) Welcome to my world. Now try making art with a baby at your breast...

RAPHAEL

Here's what I've got. There's a muscular young man with no shirt on. There is a group of confused, indecisive disciples, none of whom know what to do. And there's Jesus, floating above. How does it all make one painting?

BEATRICE

Did you go back and read the Bible story?

RAPHAEL

The Transfiguration? I know the story!

BEATRICE

How about the part right *after* the Transfiguration?

RAPHAEL

No. Why would I read that?

BEATRICE

You're an idiot. It solves all your problems.

RAPHAEL

The Bible?

BEATRICE

The story of the epileptic boy. I looked it up as soon as I finished posing for you ...

RAPHAEL

And what did you find? *(the sound of the door. Sebastiano walks in)* Bastiano!
(Sebastiano is still agitated from his fight with Michelangelo. He is startled to see Raphael in conversation with his wife)

SEBASTIANO

What are you doing here?

RAPHAEL

I brought you a capon!

SEBASTIANO

No, Raffaello. This is not the time.

RAPHAEL

I salute you! I hear you finished the Lazarus!

SEBASTIANO

I hear half your canvas isn't even begun.

RAPHAEL

It's coming any day now!

SEBASTIANO

Then what do you want? We've got nothing else for you to steal.

RAPHAEL

(he holds out a capon) Eat the capon, my friends! It's better than potatoes!

SEBASTIANO

(stung) Have you no grace? Are you an artist at *all*?

RAPHAEL

I am full of grace. That is the meaning of my name.

SEBASTIANO

(Taking the capon) Thank you for the bird. That was kind.

RAPHAEL

(clearly in a frenzy about the painting) I'm in purgatory, can't you see?

BEATRICE

Good! Purgatory is where the action is!

Michelangelo peers in through the door, looking for Sebastiano.

MICHELANGELO

Bastiano!

SEBASTIANO

Michele!

RAPHAEL

Buonarotti!

MICHELANGELO

(startled to see him) Raphael?

BEATRICE

(about Raphael) He was just leaving.

What are you doing here?
MICHELANGELO

Begging.
BEATRICE

Brainstorming!
RAPHAEL

Bullshitting.
SEBASTIANO

About what?
MICHELANGELO

Capons.
SEBASTIANO

God.
BEATRICE

Art.
RAPHAEL

The usual.
BEATRICE

MICHELANGELO
(to Raphael) Go away. Please. I need to speak to my friend.

SEBASTIANO
Me? *(beat)* There's nothing left to say.

MICHELANGELO
You misinterpreted my words--

SEBASTIANO
No, Michele. I heard you loud and clear.

MICHELANGELO
It's a *painting*! It's not *personal*.

SEBASTIANO
It is for me.

MICHELANGELO

I told you, I would start over again if I could. I don't know how!

SEBASTIANO

It's not that hard. You're just too egotistical to figure it out!

BEATRICE

Stop it. Both of you. You'll scare the baby. *(beat. Quietly, to Bastiano)* Forgive him, my love. I know he's impossible-- but he's the godfather of our child.

SEBASTIANO

Please. He's never even looked at Luciana.

MICHELANGELO

That's not true! I made a drawing — *(looking around for his drawing. Spots it on the table and picks it up. Beatrice is too preoccupied with Luciana to notice)*

SEBASTIANO

Art! You always have to turn everything into art!

MICHELANGELO

What else is there?

RAPHAEL

(fascinated) What have I missed?

MICHELANGELO

I'm sorry I offended you —

SEBASTIANO

It's not *me* who's going to be offended! Wait till the Pope--

RAPHAEL

(now he's really hooked!) Has something happened? With the Lazarus?

SEBASTIANO

None of your business. I think you should leave now. Both of you. *(He crosses to Beatrice and reaches for Luciana)* I'll hold her. *(he takes the baby, crosses away and cuddles her)*

MICHELANGELO

(urgently, to Beatrice) Talk to him. Tell him he misunderstood.

BEATRICE

You tell him. *(Michelangelo doesn't know what to say)*

RAPHAEL

(to Beatrice) Finish the story and then I'll get out, I promise! Why were you telling me about the epileptic boy?

BEATRICE

Weren't you trying to paint the power of my divine presence? *(Raphael nods)* The epileptic boy was one of Jesus' greatest feats.

RAPHAEL

Meaning...?

BEATRICE

The poor child has been sick all his life. Constant seizures. Jesus arrives and the father begs him to help-- he's asked all the disciples in vain. Jesus tells his father that he can pull the devil out of the boy's body, but only if the father believes in him. *(beat)* Pay attention to the father. The story is about *him*.

RAPHAEL

The father? (bewildered, turning to Michelangelo) Do you remember that Bible story? About an epileptic boy...

MICHELANGELO

Matthew 17?

RAPHAEL

Is it Matthew 17?

MICHELANGELO

(nodding) It's a miracle. The boy has been rolling on the ground, foaming at the mouth...

RAPHAEL

Well, I certainly don't want to paint *that*...

MICHELANGELO

Jesus arrives and blows the evil spirit out of the boy's mouth. The father realizes to his amazement that his son has been saved.

RAPHAEL

Okay...

SEBASTIANO

(from the corner) But he doesn't understand *how*. The Resurrection hasn't happened yet. The dad represents everyone who struggles with faith. You honestly don't know the story?

RAPHAEL

No. What happens?

MICHELANGELO

The father utters the most heartbreaking line in the whole Bible. He says to Jesus, "Help me to overcome my unbelief".

RAPHAEL

(staring at Michelangelo) "Help me to overcome my unbelief." *(beat. Thinking)* How does a person overcome his unbelief?

SEBASTIANO

He has to *choose* to. Of his own free will. *(they turn and look at him. He stays in the corner)* The boy's father is a totally ordinary guy. Nothing special—a person no one would look at twice. His life has hit rock bottom. And then, miraculously, his child is cured. Which fills him with joy, but also with confusion. Who was this man who had driven the devil out? Where did he come from? Where has he disappeared to?

RAPHAEL

So down below, the father is wrestling with who Jesus is, and up above, Jesus is Transfiguring and showing us that he's the Son of God! But no one sees that...

SEBASTIANO

(nodding) Because it's too soon. It takes time to believe in something. It's like falling in love. You have to make a leap, even if you can't explain why... *(Beatrice smiles)*

RAPHAEL

"Help me to overcome my unbelief!" *(nodding, looking at Bastiano)* It needs to be a real face, the father. And there it is. *(he takes out his sketch pad)*

MICHELANGELO

Watch out, Bastiano. Raphael will steal everything you've got.

RAPHAEL

(sketching feverishly) The answer has been here all along! Right in front of me! Look at those eyebrows! Don't move.

BEATRICE

Leave him alone, Rafaello.

RAPHAEL

I'm going to make him immortal!

MICHELANGELO

(to Raphael) Are you honestly going to make an epileptic fit the center of your Transfiguration?

RAPHAEL

(looking up) The moment *after* an epileptic fit. Bea was right. That's what holds the painting together.

BEATRICE

Put that confused father beneath the *real* Jesus. *That* would be a painting to remember!

MICHELANGELO

Who's the real Jesus?

BEATRICE

A flash of hope lighting up the chaos of human life. She floats above children and love and sickness and betrayal and anxiety and death. She sees it all!

SEBASTIANO

What are you talking about?

BEATRICE

(smiling) Wait till you see, Bastiano! *(to the group)* The Transfiguration has an interesting ending, in case you've forgotten... The disciples would have stayed on the mountain forever—they even offer to build shelters up there for Jesus and Moses and Elijah. But Jesus says no. He leads them all back down into the world. Because unfortunately, life isn't about being on the mountaintop. It's about what happens to us down below. *(the baby starts to squall. Bea smiles)* Sorry, sweetheart, but that's how it goes. *(Raphael approaches the baby)*

RAPHAEL

Listen to those lungs!

SEBASTIANO

(to the baby) Sssshhhh, angel. Don't be frightened. It's only Raphael. *(He begins to blow bubbles in her direction. Gradually the baby becomes quiet. Sebastiano laughs. Raphael stares at the baby. He becomes fixated on her mouth)*

RAPHAEL

What's she doing? Look at that mouth! *(he grabs his tablet again and starts to sketch)*

SEBASTIANO

She's blowing bubbles. It's her favorite activity.

BEATRICE

(curious) Why are you interested in Luciana's mouth?

RAPHAEL

(drawing) It's an incredible shape...

MICHELANGELO

I have to go. *(crossing to Bastiano)* I'm sorry you think I have failed our painting.

SEBASTIANO

We've failed each other, Michele. *(Michelangelo turns to go. Sees his drawing on the table, pockets it, and exits. There is a moment of silence while Raphael draws and Beatrice watches him. Then Sebastiano crosses to Beatrice)*

SEBASTIANO

I'm tired. Will you take her? *(he hands the baby to Beatrice, and exits without saying goodbye to Raphael. The room is quiet for a moment. Raphael looks at Beatrice with gratitude)*

RAPHAEL

I should've brought you a case of wine.

BEATRICE

But you didn't. *(beat)* Stop staring at me.

RAPHAEL

It's strange. I can make your husband's face match the father's perfectly—the raised brows—the worried eyes—but yours ... it doesn't fit...

BEATRICE

Why not?

RAPHAEL

You've got too much fire.

BEATRICE

For what?

RAPHAEL

For Jesus.

BEATRICE

Who says Jesus doesn't have fire?

RAPHAEL

According to the Bible, what Jesus felt during the Transfiguration was simply... *peace.*

BEATRICE

Then paint that. "The peace that passeth all understanding". *(smiling)* It certainly passeth *my* understanding...

RAPHAEL

Will you come see the painting? When it's finished?

BEATRICE

Should I?

RAPHAEL

(insistently) Please.

BEATRICE

(smiling) Be careful what you wish for. We muses are incredibly opinionated. *(she puts out her hand and he kisses it. Raphael turns and exits. Beatrice starts to gather up some things. Looks for a paper she can't find.)* My poem! Where did I put that poem? *(she exits with the baby to find it. Crossfade to a spotlight on Michelangelo. He stares at his drawing. Flips it over and finds Beatrice's poem on the back. He reads it)*

MICHELANGELO

Father and Child.

"Inside your tiny face
I see my own reflected
Like in a convex mirror
You stare back at me
Full of surprises
Eyes wide with amazement
As I blow bubbles at your nose.
And from deep inside of you
Where it had never been before
Comes *laughter...*
A magical gurgling sound
Like water erupting from a stone.
I stop still and imagine
How I had filled the silence
Before this moment..."

Lights shift to reveal morning in Sebastiano's studio. It's the day when the Lazarus painting is to be shown to the Cardinal and Chigi. Bastiano enters, dressed for the occasion. He starts cleaning the place up, anxiously. A knock at the door. Sebastiano exits. Voices offstage. After a beat, enter Chigi and the Cardinal, followed by a very nervous Sebastiano)

SEBASTIANO

Please, my friends. *Entrate! Benvenuti!* (“Come in! Welcome!”) It’s an honor to have you both in my studio. *(he quickly picks up the capon and chucks it under the cupboard. The Cardinal watches with amusement)*

CARDINAL

A pleasure, Sebastiano. Don’t clean up on our behalf.

CHIGI

Good morning! Such a lovely day outside—why are your shutters closed?

SEBASTIANO

So that I may open them, my lord, when I show you our painting.

CHIGI

Please do. This room smells like dead birds and overcooked chestnuts. *(looking around)* Where’s Michelangelo?

SEBASTIANO

(awkwardly) He’s... he couldn’t make it this morning. Family matters. He sends his regrets.

CARDINAL

(annoyed) Show us the painting.

SEBASTIANO

Without delay!

Bastiano pushes open the shutters and unveils the painting. The men face downstage. Staring at the painting. The Cardinal looks up, at the whole—then left, at the Apostles, and finally right, at Lazarus. He stares. He comes closer to inspect the figure.

CARDINAL

(referring to Lazarus) I see! Christ has just awakened him!

SEBASTIANO

Yes, Your Eminence.

CARDINAL

(fascinated, in spite of himself) Look how Lazarus is loosening his bonds, gently, forcefully, as he comes back to life. Even his feet are moving. What a right toe, Agostino!

CHIGI

(with distaste) Very nice.

CARDINAL

It’s like a rebirth! A prefiguration of the Resurrection!

SEBASTIANO

(gratified) Indeed.

CARDINAL

Is Michelangelo's figure perhaps too *big*? In comparison, let us say, to Jesus Christ?

SEBASTIANO

His size reflects the scale of the miracle, Your Eminence.

CHIGI

(sharply, contemplating the figure) More to the point, is he not too *dark*?

SEBASTIANO

(quickly) He's dirty! He's been in a tomb for three days...

CHIGI

That doesn't look like dirt to me.

SEBASTIANO

And he's in shadow. Do you see? Christ is illuminated in the center, while the outer contours of the picture are shaded from the light...

CARDINAL

To my eye, he looks fully lit. And deliberately dark. *(beat)* The Christ figure is charming. Luminous. It's yours, I presume?

SEBASTIANO

Yes, Cardinale. The Christ is mine. Robed in pink, as you see. Pink for the Pope.

CARDINAL

How kind. I half expected him to be nude...

SEBASTIANO

At the center of the painting is Lazarus' sister, Mary. *(pointing to the yellow figure kneeling before Christ)* Her face is based on my wife's. And the hands too.

CARDINAL

Such fingers...

CHIGI

We've heard a great deal about your wife's exceptional... assets, have we not, Your Eminence?

CARDINAL

Indeed we have. But let us return to Lazarus. His face is mysterious. Hidden. How can we tell what he's thinking?

SEBASTIANO

We can't.

CARDINAL

So not only is Lazarus *dark*, he is veiled.

SEBASTIANO

(carefully) The choice to come back to life—it's a mystery, Your Eminence. How can we even imagine it?

CARDINAL

I thought that's what artists did. Imagine the unimaginable.

CHIGI

The assignment was not to reveal doubt. It was to glorify God.

SEBASTIANO

Our Lazarus is about belief. And hope. And fear.

CARDINAL

Fear? What is there to fear? Jesus has given him a second life.

SEBASTIANO

But perhaps Lazarus didn't ask for a second life.

CARDINAL

(sharply) Are you doubting the miracle of the Resurrection?

SEBASTIANO

No! *(beat)* We're merely celebrating the unfathomable mystery of life. *(Silence. The Cardinal is unexpectedly moved. Chigi stares at him, then back at Sebastiano)* And do you see all the other stories it contains? The three women up above, covering their noses because of the smell of the corpse? Aren't they lifelike? And on the left-- do you recognize what I've included in the distance? A Roman bridge, symbol of the Pontificate, Your Eminence!

CARDINAL

Much appreciated.

SEBASTIANO

I've never painted so many figures in a single painting! Forty, in fact! Do you see? Forty figures, for only five hundred ducats!

CHIGI

Remarkable.

SEBASTIANO

Perhaps your Excellency would consider--

CHIGI

(interrupting quickly, before the talk devolves to money) Excellent work, Bastiano. Bravo.

CARDINAL

I agree. Frame it. Soon it will sit beside the Transfiguration. Then we will see which of the two paintings best glorifies the Holy Catholic Church. *(he smiles)* Go get me a drink, would you? Permit me to confer with my banker for a moment. *(Sebastiano understands that he is to leave the room. He does. The Cardinal drops the mask)* "The unfathomable mystery of life..." *(still fixated on Lazarus)* What do you say, Chigi? That Lazarus is an incredible figure, you must admit. Riveting.

CHIGI

He may be riveting but he's not a metaphor, he's a *slave*. Look at his skin tone! And he's twice the size of Christ. Who wants that in their church? *(they both stare at the Lazarus)* Of course, the nave of Narbonne Cathedral is very shadowy... perhaps no one will notice ... and if you hung Lazarus right over the altar, smoke from the candles would eventually darken the whole painting, and then--

CARDINAL

(interrupting) And then what? The figure would fade from view? Is that what you're hoping for?

CHIGI

The painting's an outrage. Aside from that beautiful Christ. Michelangelo's ego is out of control.

CARDINAL

But his Lazarus-- have you ever seen a figure evoke such wonder at being alive?

CHIGI

He's evoking disdain for everything we stand for! Bastiano was duped.

CARDINAL

(annoyed) Would you prefer it if the Lazarus were mediocre? These paintings are how we'll be remembered, you fool!

CHIGI

Raphael's will be magnificent, I promise you.

CARDINAL

When will it be ready?

CHIGI

Before Easter.

CARDINAL

Easter?! We could all be dead by Easter.

CHIGI

It's an enormous canvas. He's working as fast as he can.

CARDINAL

No he's not. He's waiting to look at Lazarus before he decides what move to make.

CHIGI

That too.

CARDINAL

When Raphael sees what Michelangelo has done, he'll want to outdo him! What will we get next—a female Jesus?

CHIGI

(reassuring) Of course not. Raphael hates sensationalism. His Transfiguration will be charming and unthreatening.

CARDINAL

You said it featured a possessed boy.

CHIGI

From what I gather, the possessed boy has been *cured*.

CARDINAL

Tell me, Chigi, which would you say has more value—piety or imagination?

CHIGI

In the short term or the long term?

CARDINAL

(scornfully) You *banker!* You care about nothing but your balance sheet. I have my eye on eternity.

CHIGI

Piety, then?

CARDINAL

Imagination, idiot!

CHIGI

What a Christian sentiment, Your Eminence.

CARDINAL

Send this painting to the Vatican. Let the Pope examine what Michelangelo has wrought. I leave this competition in the hands of God! *(The Cardinal exits. A shutter is opened and we are back in Sebastiano's studio, some months after the unveiling of the Lazarus. Michelangelo is packing some brushes and tools into a bag, preparing to leave. Beatrice is standing watching him)*

BEATRICE

You're honestly leaving before you've seen Raphael's? *(Michelangelo nods)* Why? Do you think you're going to lose?

MICHELANGELO

I think the longer I stay in Rome the more my life is at risk. Besides, I promised I would be in Florence by Easter. For the San Lorenzo tomb. They expect fifteen sculptures and an entire frieze. I'll never finish it.

BEATRICE

It will make you happy, no? To be sculpting again.

MICHELANGELO

I wanted to see our painting next to the Transfiguration. I wanted to see if it would hold its own. That would've made me happy.

BEATRICE

Of course it'll hold its own. Raphael's all talk—he won't follow through ...

MICHELANGELO

You don't think so? *(beat)* It lit him up, your story. I know that feeling, when an image takes fire and all you can do is follow it wherever it leads...

BEATRICE

Take us with you.

MICHELANGELO

I'm sorry?

BEATRICE

Please, Michele. You are the godfather of our daughter. You must have some feeling left for Bastiano. Get us out of here.

MICHELANGELO

Why?

BEATRICE

I have dreams. There are enemies everywhere. The Pope is not our friend.

MICHELANGELO

Has something happened?

BEATRICE

Not yet. But it will. I feel it will. I want to raise my daughter where we can breathe! *(he looks up at her expectantly)* I posed for Raphael. Did he tell you--?

MICHELANGELO

I gathered. That's no crime. *(beat)* You gave him the best idea of his career.

BEATRICE

We'll see. *(With feeling)* Michele—tell me-- why have you and Bastiano stopped speaking?

MICHELANGELO

(awkwardly, he can't explain) My Lazarus... displeased him.

BEATRICE

Surely not! He defended it so passionately to your patrons.

MICHELANGELO

I appreciate that.

BEATRICE

What's happened? He used to paint with such joy. But lately, everything's changed. He seems so unhappy. *(carefully)* Can't you try to see things from his point of view?

MICHELANGELO

I don't know how. Just let me get out of here and he'll be fine.

BEATRICE

He won't. He counts on you!

MICHELANGELO

(bursting out) He shouldn't! I have no understanding for human beings—I never have. I'm missing that instinct completely. Other people may be able to escape from

their own minds, their own hearts, but I find it impossible. Don't you see? I chip away at blocks of stone and hope something emerges... but I myself am trapped, forever, like a moth in amber—no matter how hard my soul tries to fly, it is always bound by my appalling body—by the limitations of my own imagination. What can I do? Everyone's searching for love and hope and transcendence, but me? I have no grace, I will have no salvation, it is my curse to see the world as I see it, to always transform the beauty in front of me into yet another piece of lifeless art the world doesn't need. Like the Lazarus I poured my whole spirit into, that is causing your husband so much pain. *(he stops abruptly)*

BEATRICE

May I ask you something? What if that model of yours had wanted to pose for Jesus instead?

MICHELANGELO

Jesus wasn't mine to paint.

BEATRICE

Do you ever ask?

MICHELANGELO

Ask what?

BEATRICE

What they want to be, your muses? *(beat)* Jesus always asks. That's what's amazing when you read the Bible. Before every miracle, Jesus approaches the afflicted person and says: "Do you want to be healed?" "Do you want to see?" And he waits for an answer before he makes his move. *(Michelangelo takes the drawing with Bea's poem on it out of his pocket)*

MICHELANGELO

I took this by accident. Forgive me.

BEATRICE

Keep it. I have the real thing.

There is a knock on the door. The Cardinal enters with Chigi. He looks ashen.

CARDINAL

Forgive this early intrusion.

MICHELANGELO

Your Eminence! Agostino! *(to Bea)* Why do you people never latch the door?

BEATRICE

(terrified) Cardinale! Signore Chigi! Forgive me. I'm not dressed. *(Chigi stares at her in silence. Calling out)* Bastiano! Come quickly! *(Sebastiano enters. Stops in shock when he sees Chigi and the Cardinal)*

SEBASTIANO

Have you come to award the prize? *(beat. Silence)* What's happened?

MICHELANGELO

You look like you've seen a ghost. Give them a seat, Bastiano. *(Sebastiano brings chairs)*

BEATRICE

(pouring water) Please... have some water. *(she puts hands them both water)*

MICHELANGELO

Is it Raphael? *(the Cardinal nods. Michelangelo steels himself. Beatrice watches intently)* Ah. He has finished the painting. It is a masterpiece. A work for the ages. Is that it? *(beat. No one moves)* You can tell us. We're grown men. The moment you let him see our Lazarus, we knew exactly what would transpire. *(Michelangelo stares at Chigi)* Have we lost the fight? Has Raphael triumphed?

CARDINAL

He is dead.

MICHELANGELO

What?

SEBASTIANO

Who?

CARDINAL

Raphael.

BEATRICE

No!

SEBASTIANO

Raphael? *(There is silence for a moment)* That's impossible. We saw him just the other day. He brought us a capon!

BEATRICE

Isn't today his birthday?

CHIGI

(nodding) His 37th birthday.

MICHELANGELO

(crossing himself) God forgive him. *(they all cross themselves)* How did it happen?

CARDINAL

A fever. So they say.

MICHELANGELO

(mystified) A fever?

CHIGI

He was found this morning. In his bed. That's all we know. The rumor is going around that he'd spent a night of excess passion...

SEBASTIANO

And that killed him?

CHIGI

Who knows? It's the Renaissance. Anything is possible.

CARDINAL

The Pope is beside himself. He lies stricken in his rooms.

BEATRICE

And the painting?

CARDINAL

The Transfiguration is hanging over Raphael's bed. At his house on the Borgo. For all to see.

SEBASTIANO

Is it finished?

CARDINAL

There has never been anything quite like it. *(beat)* There are already crowds of people lined up in the streets, fighting their way to the front for a chance to pay their respects and to see his final masterpiece.

MICHELANGELO

It's terrible. I can't imagine the world without him.

SEBASTIANO

Nor me.

CHIGI

My Villa is full of him. How will I ever eat breakfast again?

MICHELANGELO

And the Pope?

CARDINAL

He doesn't want to part with Raphael's painting. He'll send a copy to Narbonne, and keep the original for himself.

SEBASTIANO

(crestfallen) Alas.

MICHELANGELO

What kind of work is it, Your Eminence?

BEATRICE

Is there, by any chance, a *boy* in the center of it? An epileptic boy? With big biceps?

CARDINAL

You could say that. Blowing something out of his mouth.

SEBASTIANO

Bubbles!

MICHELANGELO

The Devil!

CHIGI

What did you say?

BEATRICE

It's the boy who was healed after the Transfiguration! Jesus demanded that the evil spirit come out, and then the boy opened his little round mouth and blew the Devil away!

CARDINAL

(nodding) Demonology. Yes. That's what I suspected!

CHIGI

Who the hell is going to figure that out?

CARDINAL

The top of the painting depicts transcendence of the divine. The bottom, the terrifying chaos of humanity--

CHIGI

I told him to leave that crazy boy out of it.

MICHELANGELO

Why? Art can teach people about suffering.

CHIGI

We *know* about suffering! We're tired of it. What we need is beauty!

CARDINAL

The strange thing is-- the father who holds up his child in Raphael's painting ... he looks very much like you, Bastiano. *(Bastiano smiles, turns away)*

BEATRICE

And Jesus? What does the Jesus look like?

CARDINAL

He sort of... floats. It's an arresting image. Very... curvaceous. Slightly... female. Almost as if God the Father and the Mother of God were combined into one.

BEATRICE

How inventive. *(she smiles)* My grandmother was a Spanish dancer. Did you know that, Your Holiness?

CHIGI

As a matter of fact, we know more about your family than you think.

SEBASTIANO

Do you really? *(Sebastiano casts an alarmed glance at Beatrice)*

BEATRICE

(The baby cries in the next room) Excuse me a moment. *(Beatrice rushes off to fetch her).*

MICHELANGELO

(impressed) How remarkable. Raphael actually made the painting he wanted to make. What will Narbonne have to say?

CHIGI

(antagonistically) About an epileptic Transfiguration and a black Lazarus? What do you think? People are going to stare at those bizarre altarpieces for hundreds of years, wondering what on earth they are supposed to mean.

CARDINAL

Or maybe they'll consider us absolute geniuses for having commissioned them. *(Beatrice re-enters with Luciana. She stops at the door and listens, quietly)*

SEBASTIANO

(Sebastiano takes a deep breath and moves towards the Cardinal and Chigi) And Raphael's commissions? For the Palace? The Stanze Pontificale? Who will complete them now?

CHIGI

God knows. We were behind already, and now we're screwed! *(beat)* Are you interested?

SEBASTIANO

Of course! If I could be of help, I would be more than honored. I know so well how he painted, Raphael, we were friends for years, since we were boys, almost. I could continue his projects. Don't give it to Giulio Romano, even if he was the maestro's student—he has no talent, no charm! *(Chigi nods encouragingly. Sebastiano turns to the Cardinal)* Don't you agree, Your Eminence? I could pick up right where Raphael left off! *(quickly)* Without the epileptic boys, of course. I could paint the Palace just like the old Raphael, the one you trusted. No one would even notice the difference.

CHIGI

Excellent.

CARDINAL

(distracted) We will consider it... when the time comes. Assuming your work is appropriate to the occasion... and that your wife—

SEBASTIANO

What about my wife?

CHIGI

Don't let her derail you, Bastiano. With her poems and her... problems...

BEATRICE

(startling them) What problems? *(to Bastiano)* Am I making problems, Bastiano?

SEBASTIANO

Bea!

MICHELANGELO

(quietly, to Bastiano) Don't let them talk to you that way.

SEBASTIANO

(to Michelangelo) I told you this would happen!

MICHELANGELO

Only if you permit it to!

SEBASTIANO

I have no choice! A man has to live!

MICHELLANGELO

At what price? (*angry, turning to the Cardinal*) Did you hear, my most reverend patron? My friend Bastiano hopes the Vatican will hire him to paint modified versions of Raphael, while his talented wife shuts up and nurses her baby! He's sure you will be pleased with the results. Like a chef, who gets tired of capon and decides maybe it is time to eat *onions* for a while.

BEATRICE

Stop it!

SEBASTIANO

That's not what I said.

CHIGI

What's wrong with the occasional onion, when you've eaten too much meat?

MICHELANGELO

(*to Bastiano, urgently*) Don't do this! Stand up for your wife—and for your artistic soul!

CARDINAL

(*angry*) What do you know about his artistic soul? You think your Lazarus gives you the right to dictate everything else?

MICHELANGELO

I think— (*he stops*) Never mind. I'm going to the Borgo. To look at what Raphael has made. You think we can equal him? Any of us? You think we have an iota of his courage? People will be looking at that Transfiguration when no one even remembers our names!

SEBASTIANO

Must every picture change the history of art? Might some not be valuable just by offering a little pleasure? A little beauty? We're painters, not *gods*! We decorate a few feet of wall. Angels by the yard, Madonnas by the corridor. Whatever it takes.

MICHELANGELO

You don't believe that, I know you don't.

SEBASTIANO

(*heartbroken*) Raphael was only thirty-seven! Don't you see? And now he's gone. Who knows what art will survive in a hundred years, what paintings will be

considered masterpieces, which names will be remembered? That can't be the measure of a good life, it *can't!*

MICHELANGELO

What else is there?

SEBASTIANO

Love! Children!

CHIGI

Women! Money!

SEBASTIANO

Friends! Marriage! Why are you so determined to be alone?

MICHELANGELO

Artists are always alone.

SEBASTIANO

Stop telling yourself that lie. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

BEATRICE

(intervening quickly, to Bastiano and Michelangelo) Forgive me, gentlemen. At the risk of causing more "problems" ... I think we should all go to the Borgo. Right now. I promised Raphael I would.

CARDINAL

The crowds can gawk at Raphael's painting. We must pray for his eternal soul.

MICHELANGELO

The painting *is* his eternal soul!

SEBASTIANO

(eyeing the Cardinal) Then let us stay here and celebrate it

BEATRICE

I need to see it, Bastiano. Please. The Transfiguration of Raphael. After all, Luciana's the one who inspired its creation!

CHIGI

How can that be? There's no baby in the painting.

BEATRICE

(smiling) That's what you think. *(crossing to Bastiano)* Come with me.

SEBASTIANO

Why? To see if Luciana recognizes her Papa?

BEATRICE

She will! Of course she will. She'll recognize us both. *(taking his hands)* And then one day, she'll make something equally grand.

SEBASTIANO

(gently) Not everyone has to be an artist, Beatrice.

BEATRICE

But Luciana's not just anyone. She's ours.

SEBASTIANO

(smiling) Then you go. I'll wait here. *(she hesitates. Carefully)* The Church is our support and our salvation, my love. You understand what I mean? *(Beat. She nods. She crosses to the Cardinal)*

BEATRICE

(crossing to Cardinal) Then pray for us, Cardinale. *(Beatrice turns and exits with the baby)*

MICHELANGELO

And for our immortal souls. *(Michelangelo turns for a moment, looks at Bastiano)*

SEBASTIANO

Amen. *(Michelangelo exits)*

CARDINAL

Let us pray. *(The Cardinal raises his hands, Sebastiano and Chigi kneel. As this happens, projections of "The Raising of Lazarus" and "The Transfiguration" appear in the space, floating above the crowd. In another space, Beatrice and Michelangelo look up at the paintings)*

CARDINAL

Our father, who art in heaven, forgive Thy son, Raffaello di Santo, taken from us this day, April 6, 1517.

Your power brings us to birth,

Your providence guides our lives,

And by your command, we return to dust.

Those who die still live in your presence,

Their lives change but do not end.

I pray in hope for my family, relatives and friends,

And for all the dead, known to you alone.

Michelangelo now stands in front of the Transfiguration. Beatrice stands in a pool of light, holding Luciana.

BEATRICE

In the name of Adonai the God of Israel
May the angel Michael be at my right,
And the angel Gabriel be at my left,
And in front of me the angel Uriel,
And behind me the angel Raphael,
And above my head, the Divine Presence of God.

CARDINAL, CHIGI, SEBASTIANO

In company with Christ,
Who died and now lives,
May they rejoice in your kingdom,
Where all tears are wiped away.
Unite us together again in one family...
To sing your praises forever and ever.
Amen.

BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY.