

*MONDRAGOLA*  
(a comedy about Machiavelli)

written by Gary Graves

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#### CAST

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI: age 53, getting by as a playwright.

ZENOBIA BUONDELMONTI: a young woman from a wealthy family.

BATTISTA DELLA PALLA: a young man from a wealthy family.

LUIGI ALAMANNI: a shady associate of Battista's.

#### SETTING

The action takes place in the Rucelli Gardens, an opulent estate and surrounding grounds, in Florence, 1522.

#### NOTES

It's the height of the Renaissance, but the characters wear clothes we might see today at an elite garden soiree.

It's 50 years before anyone's even heard of Shakespeare; the idea of a comic play performed in front of a small, elite crowd, is a relatively new thing.

(Reveal NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI, now 53,  
struggling to get by as a playwright,  
hungry for a fat, government contract.)

NICCOLO

My dear Battista, I'm honored to accept the invitation of the illustrious "Friends of the Garden Shade." I'd be delighted to be your guest on the afternoon and evening of June twenty-third, at the home of Mr. Rucellai. And, yes, I would be even more honored to present my latest play there, which I hope will provide a few good laughs for you and your esteemed guests. I look forward to it eagerly. I wonder, if I may, are there any funds available to cover the expenses I will incur?

(Lights change.)

2 AT THE PALAZZO RUCELLAI

2 \*

(In a room looking out on a spacious walled garden, BATTISTA DELLA PALLA waits for his co-conspirator to arrive.)

LUIGI ALAMANNI joins him in the room.)

LUIGI

Ah. There you are.

BATTISTA

Are you drunk?

LUIGI

I might have had a little something. I wouldn't say I'm drunk. Everyone's drunk; it's the last day of Carnival.

BATTISTA

(confidentially)

Have you got... "the medicine?"

LUIGI

I do indeed.

(patting his breast pocket)

BATTISTA

Are you sure it will perform exactly as advertised?

LUIGI

Absolutely. Guaranteed. I told you, I know the guy, personally.

BATTISTA

You've used this exact same "prescription" before?

LUIGI

Like I said, lots o' times.

BATTISTA

And it took effect...reliably?

LUIGI

Absolutely. Well...

BATTISTA

Well, what?

LUIGI

There was one time...

BATTISTA

Yes?



LUIGI

Oh, they took the money. The money's gone. They split. Don't worry, we'll get it back. Luca's gonna take care o' that. But it'll be a while. I think they headed for Rome.

BATTISTA

I need three actors.

LUIGI

Right. Why exactly?

BATTISTA

I promised the guy three actors.

LUIGI

What do they gotta do?

BATTISTA

They're gonna act. In the thing. Tonight.

LUIGI

What is this thing exactly?

BATTISTA

It's a play.

LUIGI

Right. What is that exactly?

BATTISTA

I don't know, it's a... Haven't you ever seen a play?

LUIGI

No.

BATTISTA

Yeah, me neither. It's supposed to be funny. The cardinal loves that stuff. That's why he's coming tonight. For the play thing.

LUIGI

Like the puppet things? On the Old Square?

BATTISTA

Sorta. I don't know. It's a play. The actors act it out. It's funny. The guy's hilarious.

LUIGI

What guy?

BATTISTA

The guy that's bringing the play.

Who is he?  
LUIGI

Machiavelli.  
BATTISTA

Who?  
LUIGI

Niccolo. Machiavelli.  
BATTISTA

Never heard of 'im.  
LUIGI

BATTISTA  
He was in the palace. A long time ago. He used to run the place. He ran into some trouble when the Medici came back. Now he writes plays. And the way he described this one, was funny as hell. The cardinal knows all about him. He can't wait to see it. That's why he's coming tonight. But I promised the guy I'd get 'em three actors.

LUIGI  
Well, if the three I lined up are any example, I'd say actors are pretty fuckin' slippery.

(MACHIAVELLI enters, harried, with a big trunk.)

NICCOLO  
Ah, Battista, there you are!

BATTISTA  
Niccolo, my friend. Good to see you. You need a hand there?

NICCOLO  
If you wouldn't mind.

BATTISTA  
Sure. What do ya got there?

NICCOLO  
(opens the trunk)  
These are the costumes...  
(a costume)  
The masks...  
(a mask)  
The props--hold this...  
(a rubber chicken)  
And these...  
(looking for something)

I know they're here somewhere--Ah, these are the scripts.  
(MORE)

NICCOLO (cont'd)  
(three hand-written script  
sides)

I just picked them up. They were running late, so I had to wait.

(sees Luigi)

Hello. And you are--?

BATTISTA

This is Mr. Alamanni. A good friend of mine.



LUIGI

Just call me Luigi.

NICCOLO

Luigi. Wonderful. A pleasure to meet you.

BATTISTA

I'm afraid I have some bad news.

NICCOLO

Bad news? Oh, God, what?

BATTISTA

The actors.

NICCOLO

Yes?

BATTISTA

They ran out on me.

NICCOLO

What?

LUIGI

Took a pretty piece o' change with'em, too.

NICCOLO

You mean--?

BATTISTA

Don't worry about it--

LUIGI

Yeah, don't worry, we'll find 'em. And when we do...  
(draws his thumb across his  
throat)

NICCOLO

I need three actors.

BATTISTA

I know you do. And we're gonna fix that.

NICCOLO

Fix it how? We go up at eight o'clock tonight.

BATTISTA

Right, eight o'clock.

NICCOLO

We have to rehearse. They have to memorize their lines. I told you, we have to have three actors, here, / now, we're already running behind--

BATTISTA

Whoa, whoa, keep your jock on, Dad. I got it covered. Don't worry.

(beat)

You calmed down?

NICCOLO

Yes. I'm perfectly calm. Where am I going to get three actors eight hours before I'm expected to present my play?

(beat)

You promised me you would hire three actors. Two men. And a woman--

BATTISTA

Me and him'll do it.

LUIGI

Huh?

NICCOLO

What?

BATTISTA

Me and Luigi. We'll do it.

NICCOLO

You and him?

BATTISTA

Why not?

(They look at Luigi.)

LUIGI

What do I gotta do?

NICCOLO

(to Battista)

Have you ever acted on stage before?

BATTISTA

Sure. Lots a times.

NICCOLO

(to Luigi)

You?

LUIGI

"On stage?" Yeah, what exactly is that?

NICCOLO

I don't think so, Battista.

BATTISTA

(to Luigi)

There's nothin' to it. All you gotta do is say the words.

(to Niccolo)

Right?

NICCOLO

You have to memorize the lines, put your costume on, and do the whole thing in sequence. As rehearsed.

LUIGI

What do ya mean, rehearsed?

NICCOLO

This won't do.

BATTISTA

Rehearsal, Luigi. We practice the... the thing.

(to Niccolo)

Right?

NICCOLO

It's not as easy as it sounds.

BATTISTA

We'll be great. Luigi's a funny guy.

LUIGI

Me?

BATTISTA

Yeah, you're always good for a laugh. Am I right?

(LUIGI laughs.)

BATTISTA laughs.)

BATTISTA

We'll be great. He's a natural.

NICCOLO

What about the woman?

BATTISTA

Huh?

NICCOLO

The woman. The third actor. We need a woman.

LUIGI

You can say that again.

(laughs)

NICCOLO

Very funny. I don't think this will work. Is the cardinal coming?

BATTISTA

Oh, yeah. He'll be here.

NICCOLO

Oh, Jesus!

BATTISTA

What--you got a problem with the cardinal?

NICCOLO

No, no, of course, not.

LUIGI

You don't like 'im?

NICCOLO

What? No. He's the cardinal. He's very...discriminating. He's an expert on Roman Comedy.

LUIGI

On what now?

NICCOLO

Plautus, Terrence--*The Menechimi*? Nevermind. The cardinal is a very distinguished patron of the form.

BATTISTA

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know all that.

NICCOLO

This has to be good.

BATTISTA

I know who we can get.

LUIGI

Who?

BATTISTA

Zenobia.

LUIGI

Oh. Yeah. She'd be great.

NICCOLO

Who?

BATTISTA

Zenobia Buondelmonte.

Buondelmonte?

NICCOLO

Mm-hm.

BATTISTA

Her old man made a killing in silk.

LUIGI

I know who the Buondelmonte's are, thank you. I used to work with GianFranco.

NICCOLO

You're kinda touchy, aren't ya?

LUIGI

I'm just concerned about the time. Eight o'clock will be here in a heartbeat.

NICCOLO

(back to Battista)  
Now, this Zenobia, is she...

BATTISTA

What?

NICCOLO

Well, is she...the character of Lucrezia has to be...well, you know...

LUIGI

What?

NICCOLO

She has to be a knock-out.

(ZENOBIA BUONDELMONTE enters wearing a Carnival mask.

Beat.)

BATTISTA

Hello, Zenobia.

ZENOBIA

Hello, yourself.

(The three guys look at Zenobia.)

ZENOBIA

What?

NICCOLO

Hello.

\*

ZENOBIA  
(the mask comes off)  
Are you the writer guy?

\*

BATTISTA  
Allow me to introduce you: Zenobia Buondelmonte. Niccolo Machiavelli.

ZENOBIA  
Yeah, I know all about you.

NICCOLO  
Me? Ut-oh.  
(a laugh)

LUIGI  
Hello, Zenobia.

ZENOBIA  
Hello.  
(to Battista)  
Luca wants to talk to you.

BATTISTA  
Luca--why?  
(ZENOBIA glances at NICCOLO)  
Is there a problem?

ZENOBIA  
You'll have to ask him.  
(beat)

BATTISTA  
We need you to be in the play thing tonight.

ZENOBIA  
What?

BATTISTA  
The play thing. We need you to be one the actors.  
(to Niccolo)  
Act-ress?

ZENOBIA  
I thought you had the actors lined up.

BATTISTA  
We did, but...it's a long story.

LUIGI  
Powder. Poof.

ZENOBIA

You're kidding.

LUIGI

Don't worry. We're taking care of it.

BATTISTA

But we need you to...you know...

ZENOBIA

Act in the play?

BATTISTA

Yeah.

LUIGI

Yeah.

ZENOBIA

Tonight?

BATTISTA

Yeah. It's an emergency.

(beat)

ZENOBIA

(to Niccolo)

What's the part?

NICCOLO

The part?

ZENOBIA

You heard me.

NICCOLO

Lucrezia. Married to Mr. Rich. A loveless marriage with a man old enough to be her father.

(he laughs)

(LUIGI laughs.)

ZENOBIA

Yuck. No way.

NICCOLO

Till she meets Callimaco.

(to Battista)

That's you. A handsome young rogue, just back from Paris.

(BATTISTA smirks.)

LUIGI scoffs.)

ZENOBIA  
(considering)

Hm...

LUIGI  
What about me?

MACHIABELLI  
You'll be Ligurio.

LUIGI  
Ligurio. Good name.

MACHIABELLI  
The parasite.

LUIGI  
What did you say?

MACHIABELLI  
Jack of all trades? An opportunist--how about that?  
Together, you two cook up a scheme to hoodwink the old guy,  
and get these two into bed together.

ZENOBIA  
(looking at Battista)  
Me and him?  
(he smiles at her)  
Lemme see the script.

NICCOLO  
(gives her a script side)  
Have you done this before?

ZENOBIA  
Maybe. What's the story?

NICCOLO  
The story? Well, it's a comedy. In the Roman tradition.

LUIGI  
I don't like Romans. I don't trust 'em.

NICCOLO  
Not Romans today. The old Romans. A thousand years ago.

LUIGI  
Oh, those guys.

NICCOLO  
But it's set right here. In town. Around the home of Mr.  
Rich. A wealthy lawyer. Rather advanced in years. Well,  
let's say, no longer a young man.



ZENOBIA

A fool.

NICCOLO

Yes. I suppose you could say that.

ZENOBIA

And who's that?

NICCOLO

That's me. Mr. Rich. First, I'll introduce the play--where are we doing it?

BATTISTA

(pointing to a door)

In there.

NICCOLO

Through here?

(opening the door, looks off)

Ah!

(He exits.)

Zenobia closes the door after he's off.)

ZENOBIA

(to Battista)

What the hell is going on?

LUIGI

It's a play.

ZENOBIA

I know what a play is, you idiot. Are we going through with this or not?

LUIGI

What--you mean the thing?

ZENOBIA

Yeah, the thing, are we doin' this or not?

BATTISTA

Yeah, we're doin' it. What's the problem with Luca?

ZENOBIA

I don't know. He wouldn't say. He said he wants to talk to you, and only you--the dick.

LUIGI

You want me to talk to 'em?

BATTISTA

All right, all right, all right, I'll talk to Luca. There's nothing to worry about. Everything's fine. We're all set to go.

(to Zenobia)

Just tell him you'll be in the play.

LUIGI

Who--Luca?

BATTISTA

No!

(NICCOLO re-enters through a different door.)

NICCOLO

Perfect. Beautiful. I love it.

(gives Luigi the Ligurio side)

Here you are--Ligurio.

(and gives Battista the Callimaco side)

And Callimaco.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

LUIGI

(reading the title)

"Mon...drag...?"

NICCOLO

(with Italian accent)

"Mondragola!"

LUIGI

Oh. Like the root.

(laughs)

That's funny.

NICCOLO

The "love root."

ZENOBIA

What?

NICCOLO

It's an aphrodisiac. With deadly side effects.

ZENOBIA

I don't know about this.

BATTISTA

No, it's funny. It's hilarious.

ZENOBIA

I'm not takin' my clothes off.

BATTISTA

Tell her, tell her.

NICCOLO

The rogue, Callimaco, arrives back in town, from his travels in France, and who does he see? The lovely Lucrezia. Instantly, he is gripped by a passion. He's in love. He's hit by the lightning bolt. He must be with her.

ZENOBIA

So he drugs her?

NICCOLO

No. They pretend to give her "the Mandrake Root," the love potion--

LUIGI

*Mondragola!* The Love Root.

(The guys laugh.)

ZENOBIA

Why?

BATTISTA

This is funny. Go ahead, tell her.

NICCOLO

They give her the potion, cause there's a problem. A side effect, you might say. The first guy that sleeps with her...

ZENOBIA

Yeah?

NICCOLO

It kills him.

ZENOBIA

What?

(LUIGI, BATTISTA, and NICCOLO all laugh.)

ZENOBIA

Why is that funny?

NICCOLO

It's a scam. It's a hoax. It's what they tell the old guy to get him to go along with it.

ZENOBIA

With what?

NICCOLO

The scam. They gotta find somebody to sleep with her first, "to draw out the poison." So they get him--Callimaco.

(More laughter.)

ZENOBIA  
That's not funny. It's stupid.

(The laughter dies.

Awkward.)

NICCOLO  
Maybe this isn't such a good idea.

BATTISTA  
It's a great idea. Don't worry. She'll be great. Won't you, Zenobia?

(She turns away, and starts reading the script.)

BATTISTA  
(to Niccolo)  
She'll be great, don't worry about it. The cardinal's gonna love it. We'll see you at eight o'clock. It's gonna be a hit for sure--

NICCOLO  
Wait a minute, wait a minute, we have to rehearse.

BATTISTA  
Oh, don't worry about that, we'll be fine--

NICCOLO  
You need to memorize your lines!

LUIGI  
What? Are you kidding me? Memorize this?

NICCOLO  
Yes! You have to be off the page. You need to make it seem like you're actually thinking up the things you say.

LUIGI  
What?

NICCOLO  
You have to act like you're really the character. Like it's really happening. You can't be reading the words off the page. You have to memorize them. Really well. Really, really well. You can't just make them up. You have to say the words exactly. And we have to practice that. We have to go over it. A lot. So you know what you're doing, and when you do it--what you say. It's all very precise.

LUIGI

I don't know about this.

BATTISTA

All right, fine. We'll memorize our lines and we'll meet out in the garden in an hour to..."rehearse." How's that?

ZENOBIA

Two hours. If you want it memorized, I need two hours.

LUIGI

Memorize all this?

BATTISTA

All right, two hours. We'll meet out in the garden in two hours. In the laurel grove, just past the statue of Diana. Right out there. You see it?

NICCOLO

All right. Two o'clock. Out in the garden. Good.  
(he gathers all the props and costumes)

I want to have another look at the room. This place is amazing. One thing, Battista.

(taking him aside)

I wanted to ask you, did you have a chance to mention my name to the cardinal about...the history?

BATTISTA

(uncertain)

Hm?

NICCOLO

The History Commission?

BATTISTA

Oh, that.

NICCOLO

You said you might mention my name for that.

BATTISTA

That's a serious work. It's a history book, right?

NICCOLO

It's the History of Florence.

LUIGI

A fat little prize for some lucky little bookworm.

NICCOLO

Yes. I just wondered if you had a chance to mention my name--

BATTISTA

Yeah, I mentioned your name about that.

NICCOLO

Ah. Wonderful. What was his... Any--?

BATTISTA

He's not sure it's a good idea to have a guy who writes comedies write the History of Florence.

(ZENOBIA laughs.)

NICCOLO

Well, I've written serious works, as well.

ZENOBIA

(sarcastically)

Oh, really?

NICCOLO

Yeah, really.

(She returns to reading her lines.)

BATTISTA

All right, you wanna talk to him?

NICCOLO

Huh? Are you kidding? Really? You think you might be able to arrange that?

BATTISTA

Why not? I'll see what I can do.

NICCOLO

After the show perhaps?

BATTISTA

Sure. After the show. Count on it.

NICCOLO

Oh, thank you. Thank you, Battista. I think he's really gonna like this. You guys'll be great. Thanks so much. Really.

(NICCOLO exits.)

They listen to make sure he's gone.)

ZENOBIA

This is stupid. What's this all about?

BATTISTA

The cardinal's coming to see the play, the actors took off--

LUIGI

With the money I fronted 'em--

BATTISTA

So we gotta do the play. Just play along with it.

ZENOBIA

Play along with it--are you nuts?

BATTISTA

Just play along with it till eight o'clock. After that, what's it gonna matter? Right?

ZENOBIA

Oh.

BATTISTA

You see what I mean?

ZENOBIA

Right.

BATTISTA

Is Benni ready?

ZENOBIA

Yeah, he's ready.

BATTISTA

Excellent. We're doing this. No matter what. Right?  
(beat)

Luigi?

LUIGI

(engrossed in his script)

Huh?

BATTISTA

Come here.

(LUIGI joins the other two.)

BATTISTA

(puts his hand out)

All the way?

LUIGI

Are you kiddin'? Like I said.

(puts his hand on Battista's)

(They look to Zenobia.)



ZENOBIA  
(puts her hand on theirs)

All the way.

BATTISTA  
Good. Good. I'll see what Luca wants. Is he out on the square?

ZENOBIA  
He was ten minutes ago.

BATTISTA  
Don't worry about it. Luca's practically my brother.

LUIGI  
I gotta study my lines. All these lines.

BATTISTA  
Luigi--

LUIGI  
How am I supposed to memorize all these lines? Holy Mary! I need to be alone. I need to focus.

(LUIGI exits, temperamentally, into the garden.)

BATTISTA

He's taking this acting thing way too seriously.

ZENOBIA

Are you sure we can trust him?

BATTISTA

Don't worry about Luigi. He's got the stuff, and he knows how to use it. I know the guy. He's...highly motivated.

ZENOBIA

And what about this writer-guy?

BATTISTA

He hasn't gotta clue. Don't worry about him.

ZENOBIA

You sure about that?

BATTISTA

Why, what do you know about him?

ZENOBIA

He was in on the whole thing with Valentino.

BATTISTA

Who?

\*

ZENOBIA

Cesare Borgia? Does that ring a bell?

BATTISTA

This guy?

ZENOBIA

He used to be a shark.

BATTISTA

No way.

ZENOBIA

There's more to him than meets the eye. And I'm telling you, he could be very useful, when this is over.

BATTISTA

How?

ZENOBIA

He used to practically run the palace, back before the Medici took over. You know how to do that?

(beat)

He was a cheerleader for the Old Republic. I'm telling you, he could be very useful.

BATTISTA

How do you know so much about this guy?

ZENOBIA

Nevermind how I know. I know.

BATTISTA

Maybe you should talk to him. Feel him out on the subject.

ZENOBIA

Maybe I should.

BATTISTA

(moving closer)

Maybe you should talk to me.

ZENOBIA

Maybe I will.

BATTISTA

Tonight?

(They almost kiss.)

ZENOBIA

Go. Find Luca. See what his problem is. I don't like that guy.

BATTISTA

Don't worry about Luca. I told you, he's practically my brother. I'll meet you out in the garden.

(whispering)

Long live the Republic!

(He exits.

She thinks for a moment.

What if they fail?

But if they succeed...

She smiles.

Looks at the script.

Saunters off,

out into the garden,

reading as she goes.

Lights change.)

3 IN THE GARDEN

3

(Later.

Lots of sunlight through lots of trees.

In the distance, a bell clangs two o'clock.

NICCOLO enters, and anxiously waits for the others to arrive.)

NICCOLO

(to himself)

All righty, two o'clock. Two o'clock everybody. Where are we?

(sees Zenobia)

Ah.

(ZENOBIA wanders in reading her script.)

NICCOLO

Hello.

ZENOBIA

Oh. Hi.

NICCOLO

How the lines coming?

ZENOBIA

(with a shrug)

Hm...

NICCOLO

Oh?

ZENOBIA

Maybe I just don't get it.

NICCOLO

Get...what?

ZENOBIA

Well, it's only my lines, of course. I don't know about the rest of it.

NICCOLO

Of course, of course. Your lines, and your cues.

ZENOBIA

Why don't you put the whole play in here?

NICCOLO

Saves on copying, if you just write out the lines you need to memorize. And your cues.

ZENOBIA

It would be better if we--if the actors--had the whole play.

NICCOLO

There are other considerations.

ZENOBIA

What--money? You're too cheap to pay for full copies of the play?

NICCOLO

To be honest, it's better if the actors don't know the whole play.

ZENOBIA

Why's that?

NICCOLO

Then everybody's a writer. "My character wouldn't say this," "How about this? How about that?"

ZENOBIA

So treat 'em like puppets?

NICCOLO

No. Well...

ZENOBIA

Just shut up, and say your lines. Is that it?

MACHIAVELLI

If I gave you a full copy of the play...would you really read it? Or would you just memorize your own lines?

ZENOBIA

I might.

NICCOLO

You might what?

ZENOBIA

I might read it.

NICCOLO

Where did you learn to...are you an actress?

ZENOBIA

Doesn't really interest me.

(beat)

What are you trying to say?

What? NICCOLO

With the play. ZENOBIA

Oh. NICCOLO

What's it about? Really. ZENOBIA

What's it about? It's... It's a... It's just a silly comedy.  
(a laugh) NICCOLO

It doesn't seem very funny to me. ZENOBIA

Oh. Well, I'm sorry to hear that. They're...base, foolish  
people. Selfish people. Openly. Obviously. Same as  
everyone else. NICCOLO  
(another laugh)

Really. ZENOBIA

That's the joke. NICCOLO

Right. I get it. ZENOBIA

(beat)

Where are they--? NICCOLO  
(looking around)

What does she want? ZENOBIA

Hm? NICCOLO

(the script) ZENOBIA

Lucrezia. What does she want? I don't know what she wants.  
How can we know her, if we don't know what she wants? She  
doesn't want anything. She's just there. She's like an  
object. Why should I care?

NICCOLO  
Well, I didn't really look at it from that point of view--

ZENOBIA  
Exactly.  
(beat)  
It's him.

NICCOLO  
What--who?

ZENOBIA  
The guy who comes back from France.

NICCOLO  
Callimaco?

ZENOBIA  
Yeah. The guy. That's what she wants.

NICCOLO  
Oh. Well...

ZENOBIA  
She should be in on the gag. It should be her idea. Cause she wants the guy. Not the old fool, her gross husband.

NICCOLO  
Well...

ZENOBIA  
Nevermind. What's it matter.

NICCOLO  
(looking for the others)  
This is getting...worrisome.

ZENOBIA  
Relax.

NICCOLO  
It's after two.

ZENOBIA  
Don't worry about it.

NICCOLO  
She wants to be in love.

ZENOBIA  
What?

NICCOLO  
That's what she wants.

ZENOBIA

Love? Really? Why not something more than that?

NICCOLO

More than love?

ZENOBIA

She should want her own thing. Her own place.

NICCOLO

She wants to be free.

(beat)

ZENOBIA

That's good. I like that.

(referring to the script)

This is crap.

NICCOLO

I'm really sorry you feel that way, but it's what we've got for tonight. Right?

(beat)

The cardinal will love it. I hope.

ZENOBIA

The cardinal.

NICCOLO

Yeah. The cardinal. What?

ZENOBIA

Nothing. Forget it.

(beat)

NICCOLO

I know your father. Well, I used to know him. That was a long time ago. Not sure he'd even remember me now.

ZENOBIA

I wouldn't know.

NICCOLO

I didn't know he had a daughter.

ZENOBIA

We don't talk.

NICCOLO

Oh. Sorry to hear that.

ZENOBIA

He's an asshole.



Oh?  
NICCOLO  
(beat)  
Very good friends with the duke, though. Isn't he?  
ZENOBIA  
What if he is?  
NICCOLO  
Well, the duke is...  
ZENOBIA  
You know...I read your book.  
NICCOLO  
My book? What book?  
ZENOBIA  
*The Prince*. That's you, right?  
NICCOLO  
You read it?  
ZENOBIA  
Mm-hm.  
NICCOLO  
Where did you get it?  
ZENOBIA  
Oh, a friend lent it to me.  
NICCOLO  
I gave that to Lorenzino de Medici.  
ZENOBIA  
Yeah. I know.  
NICCOLO  
That was the manuscript copy. The only one.  
ZENOBIA  
I read a printed copy.  
NICCOLO  
It's in print?  
ZENOBIA  
You didn't know that?  
NICCOLO  
That's interesting.

ZENOBIA

Where you been, writer-guy?

NICCOLO

I'm out in Sant'Andrea. Just me. All alone. Writing away.  
I don't hear anything out there.

(a realization)

That thing's in print?

ZENOBIA

It's not easy to get.

NICCOLO

Who gave it to you?

ZENOBIA

Why?

NICCOLO

I'd like to know who's printing it, and selling it.

ZENOBIA

It's not for sale. It's just...going around.

NICCOLO

It wasn't meant for public consumption. It was a gift.

ZENOBIA

Yeah, to Lorenzino de Medici, you said that. \*

NICCOLO

He was a student of mine. When he was a boy. I taught him  
the classics, and Latin.

ZENOBIA

He's dead. In case you haven't heard.

NICCOLO

Yes, I heard that, thank you.

ZENOBIA

Lotta good the classics did him.

(beat)

NICCOLO

What did you think of it?

ZENOBIA

Hm?

NICCOLO

The book. My book.

ZENOBIA  
Oh, right.  
(shrugs)  
I'm not sure. \*

NICCOLO  
Why not? \*

ZENOBIA  
I'm not sure. \*

NICCOLO  
Has Battista read it?

ZENOBIA  
How would I know?

NICCOLO  
Just wondered.  
(beat)  
Are you and him...

ZENOBIA  
You really think people should lie and deceive others in order to get what they want?

NICCOLO  
I think sometimes it's necessary, if you want to be a prince.

ZENOBIA  
A prince.

NICCOLO  
A king, a boss, a *capo di capi*. A Prince of the City. Or anywhere else really. But I'm not in politics anymore.

ZENOBIA  
You were a big shot in the palace, right?

NICCOLO  
I wouldn't say that.

ZENOBIA  
I heard you used to run the place.

NICCOLO  
I was a glorified secretary. Nothing more.

ZENOBIA  
Secretary of State, right?

NICCOLO  
For a little while. That's right. Till the whole thing came crashing down.

ZENOBIA

Was that your fault?

(He laughs.)

NICCOLO

God, no. The idiots all around me did that.

ZENOBIA

Right.

NICCOLO

And the pope--don't get me started. Fucking Julius. And we thought the Borgias were bad.

(hushed)

The Church. That's what's kept us at each other's throats. We could have had a real country. But no. Too many greedy little men. You can't build a solid country on greed. Petty little men cutting each other's throats.

(beat)

But...such is man. You wouldn't believe what I've seen. For what? For one prince or another.

ZENOBIA

Like Lorenzino de Medici?

(beat)

What about the Republic?

NICCOLO

(looks around nervously)

What about it?

ZENOBIA

It's our birthright.

NICCOLO

Not anymore, it's not.

ZENOBIA

You were all about the Republic.

NICCOLO

When I was young, like you, yeah. And I was proud of it.

ZENOBIA

"The only defense against corruption is self-sacrifice for the good of the people." That's in your book.

NICCOLO

You memorized it?

ZENOBIA

"The multitude is wiser and more constant than a prince."  
Your words.

(MORE)

ZENOBIA (cont'd)

(beat)

"We can forgive even Romulus for killing Remus, because he did it for the common good."

(beat)

Freedom. For everybody. Not just the rich motherfuckers.

NICCOLO

Is this why you don't get along so well with your father?

ZENOBIA

So, all that's just a bunch of words to you?

NICCOLO

I told you, I'm not in politics anymore. Are you?

(She looks him in the eye.)

NICCOLO

Are you?

ZENOBIA

Florence is a republic. And everybody knows it.

NICCOLO

That kind of talk will get your head cut off, my dear. Take it from me.

ZENOBIA

More words. Is that all you're good for?

NICCOLO

Have you ever been in the Bargello? Downstairs in the Bargello? Way downstairs? In the Rat-holes? That's what they call 'em. I was down there for twenty-two days. They told me they were gonna cut my head off. But they didn't. Thank you, sweet Fortune. That'll bring clarity to your thinking. When you're looking at the ax. They thought I was in on a plot to kill Piero. Lorenzino's father. This was all before you were born, I expect.

ZENOBIA

Piero de Medici was a pathetic idiot.

NICCOLO

That may be true. But it didn't really matter very much when they hoisted me on the strappado. You know what that is?

ZENOBIA

The thing where they hang you up by your arms?

NICCOLO

Yeah. The Rope. Tied to your hands, behind your back. And up you go...till... You don't wanna know.

(beat)

(MORE)

\*  
\*

NICCOLO (cont'd)

I told 'em, I don't know anything about Piero. And I didn't. I was innocent. Actually innocent. On that, anyway. And I never confessed. Six drops, and six yanks on the Rope. Yeah. I recommend you keep your mouth shut about the Medici.

(beat)

I just wanna keep a roof over my head. Is that such a crime?

ZENOBIA

Right. So, you make money doing this? These plays you write?

NICCOLO

A little. People think they're funny. Not you, maybe. But some do. Plays are new. They're silly. Everybody likes a good laugh. Don't they? Is that such a bad thing? To make people laugh?

(beat)

What do you do?

ZENOBIA

I do a lotta things.

NICCOLO

What do you like to do most?

ZENOBIA

Most?

(beat)

I'm a painter.

NICCOLO

You're a painter?

ZENOBIA

You gotta problem with that?

NICCOLO

No, I just...didn't realize you... You're a painter. Wonderful. I've known a few artists in my day. Interesting people. Artists. Can't say I actually know very much about art, though. What sort of painting do you do?

ZENOBIA

I don't talk about my painting.

NICCOLO

Oh. Why not?

ZENOBIA

It's very...personal. When I paint...I take all my clothes off. Paint gets everywhere. All over the place. I roll in it. It's another world. The stuff I do isn't anything like what you'll see at the palace, or in the Medici gardens, or here. In this dump.

NICCOLO

You sound very angry.

ZENOBIA

You wanna write the history of Florence. \*

NICCOLO

Are you kidding? \*

ZENOBIA

You want the money. \*

NICCOLO

The history of Florence? That would be a dream come true for me. \*

ZENOBIA

A Medici commission--that's your idea of a dream come true?

NICCOLO

Easy to say when your father's Gianfranco Buondelmonte.

ZENOBIA

I don't get a penny from my father. I hate his guts.

NICCOLO

Really. Wow. Well, I'm sorry to hear that.

ZENOBIA

Oh, please.

NICCOLO

Look, I'm fifty-three years old. I'm getting old. I need to make sure I've got a roof over my head. While I grow old and die, is that all right with you? Yeah, I'd like a Medici commission. It may surprise you to know I actually know a little bit about history. Our history. I've been studying it my whole life. Thinking about it. Analyzing it. Trying to understand the principles of how people think--about power. Control. Advantage. Weakness. How you succeed in these shark-infested waters. And how you fail. Yeah, that's what I wanna do. So shoot me.

ZENOBIA

You wanna write a history book for a Medici cardinal.

NICCOLO

Well, I would end it when the Medici took over. The first time. There's plenty of history before the Medici.

ZENOBIA

The history of the Republic.

NICCOLO

Yeah. That's right.

ZENOBIA

You sure you're not interested in politics anymore?

(beat)

I think there's hope for you yet.

NICCOLO

Oh, yeah, why's that?

(She changes the subject.)

ZENOBIA

What really happened to that guy?

NICCOLO

What guy?

ZENOBIA

The duke. Lorenzino. You're old pal. The one you gave the book to.

NICCOLO

Oh. Lorenzino. Well, I heard he was killed in Urbino. In the trouble there. That was what--has it been ten years? Almost ten years. I heard he was wounded. Trying to take back the city. After Rovair took it from him. And he died. On and on it goes. \*

ZENOBIA

You sure he wasn't whacked?

NICCOLO

I wouldn't know. But I was sad to get the news...that he was...gone. I had high hopes for Lorenzino.

ZENOBIA

Just another Medici.

NICCOLO

(looks around again)

You really should watch what you say. Especially here.

ZENOBIA

I know my way around these assholes.

NICCOLO

(doubtful)

You do huh.

(looking around)

Where are they? At this point, we might as well...

(to her)

We have to rehearse. Where are they?



ZENOBIA

Relax. It'll be fine.

NICCOLO

I made it clear we'd meet out here in the garden, didn't I?

ZENOBIA

How do you feel about the Old Republic these days? \*

NICCOLO

You mean...

ZENOBIA

You know what I mean.

(Now he changes the subject.)

NICCOLO

Why don't we go over your lines.

ZENOBIA

You think people are selfish and petty.

NICCOLO

Shall I cue you?

ZENOBIA

Which is it? Are you willing to fight for the Republic, or are you a coward?

(Beat.

She starts off.)

NICCOLO

What--wait--where you going? Hey!

(She's gone.)

NICCOLO

Great. We go up in five hours. And she's walked. \*

(He sits and holds his head in his hands.)

(BATTISTA arrives, silently. Sees Niccolo. Looks around.)

BATTISTA

Where's Zenobia?

NICCOLO

Ah. Battista. Finally--

BATTISTA  
Is she here?

NICCOLO  
No. She just left.

BATTISTA  
She left? Why? Where'd she go?

NICCOLO  
(pointing)  
That way. She just...

BATTISTA  
What? She just what?

NICCOLO  
She's...upset?

BATTISTA  
Upset? Why is she upset?

NICCOLO  
I'm not sure. She's...uh...

BATTISTA  
What? She's what?

NICCOLO  
She's very...upset.

BATTISTA  
Why?

NICCOLO  
I don't know. Are you and her...

BATTISTA  
What?

NICCOLO  
I don't know why she's upset. Maybe you should go and find her, and bring her back here so we can rehearse. Like we said we would. Remember?

BATTISTA  
I'm here aren't I?

NICCOLO  
You're late.

BATTISTA  
I'm late? Are you telling me I'm late?

NICCOLO

We have to rehearse.

BATTISTA

I know that. And we will.

NICCOLO

Where's Luigi?

BATTISTA

What am I--his nurse-maid? Don't worry, he's around. He'll be here.

NICCOLO

We have five hours until we perform in front of the Cardinal de'Medici.

BATTISTA

What did you and Zenobia talk about?

NICCOLO

What did we talk about? We didn't talk about anything.

BATTISTA

Nothing?

NICCOLO

Well...you know...

BATTISTA

What?

NICCOLO

We just...went over her lines.

BATTISTA

What?

NICCOLO

We practiced her lines. Her lines in the play? She's quite a talent.

BATTISTA

You think I don't know that?

NICCOLO

No, of course you know that.

(BATTISTA starts out.)

NICCOLO

Wait--where you going?

BATTISTA

(stopping)

I'm gonna go get Zenobia. And Luigi. And we're gonna rehearse. Like I said.

(BATTISTA exits.)

NICCOLO

(alone)

What is going on here?

LUIGI

(off stage)

Father, go back to your devotions...If we need anything else,  
we'll come find you...

(LUIGI enters, studying his lines.)

LUIGI

I shall find Doctor Callimaco and get him to send...

(checks script)

The potion.

(MORE)

LUIGI (cont'd)  
(sees Niccolo)

This is hard.

NICCOLO

How's it coming?

LUIGI  
(shaking his head)

I don't know.

NICCOLO

Just...try to relax...and have fun!

LUIGI

Where is everybody?

NICCOLO

Well, Zenobia went that way, and Battista just went looking for her--

LUIGI

I'm gettin' kinda nervous.

NICCOLO

Nervous? Don't be nervous. You'll be great. Just keep working on your lines. You want me to cue you?

LUIGI

What now?

NICCOLO

Cue you. I'll say the other lines, and you can practice yours.

LUIGI

Not sure I follow.

NICCOLO

Oh, boy. Let me see. Where are you?  
(checks his script)

Ah. Yes. Scene three. Ligurio alone. You've just met with Mr. Rich--

LUIGI

That's you, right?

NICCOLO

That's right, I'm Mr. Rich.

LUIGI

The sucker.

NICCOLO

If you like.

LUIGI

The guy's an idiot.

NICCOLO

Yes, and he's just left you, outside, in front of his house.  
And you say?

(Beat.)

LUIGI

I forget.

NICCOLO

(prompting him)

I don't think...

LUIGI

What?

NICCOLO

I don't think.

LUIGI

What are you talking about?

NICCOLO

That's your line, "I don't think..."

LUIGI

Oh! Right. I see. That's my line, what you're saying.

NICCOLO

Yes.

LUIGI

What is it again?

NICCOLO

"I don't think!"

LUIGI

Right, right... I don't think...

(beat)

What comes after that?

NICCOLO

"I don't think there is anyone else in the whole world as stupid as him."

LUIGI

Right, right. I thought I knew this. I knew this a minute ago. I just did it perfectly.

NICCOLO

Just...say it.

LUIGI

Right. I don't think there's anyone else in the whole world as stupid as this guy.



NICCOLO  
(correcting him)

As him.

LUIGI

What?

NICCOLO

"As stupid as him."

LUIGI

You gonna correct every word?

NICCOLO

Accuracy is important.

LUIGI

Don't correct me. I just need to get the general feel of it, and I can take it from there.

NICCOLO

No, no, the words...are carefully chosen, for very specific reasons, so the whole thing works together.

LUIGI

You wanna memorize this?

NICCOLO

I already know it.

LUIGI

Okay, great, then why don't you be everybody in it? What do ya need me for?

NICCOLO

I'm just trying to be helpful.

LUIGI

You're not helping. I need to be alone. Gimme that.

(snatches the script)

I need to think about this guy. Who is he? Who is this guy?

NICCOLO

He's a crook. He's in it for himself. He knows everybody's on the take. Especially the priest. They're all in it for the money.

LUIGI

Except for Callimaco. He's in love.

NICCOLO

Exactly.

LUIGI

I can relate to that.

NICCOLO

Really?

LUIGI

Yeah. I know this guy.

NICCOLO

Which guy--Ligurio?

LUIGI

He's me.

NICCOLO

Right. Okay. Can we run over your lines a bit more?

LUIGI

No. I got this. Don't worry. I just need to be alone with my thoughts for a little bit. I wanna really get into his head.

NICCOLO

I wouldn't worry about that so much--

LUIGI

Don't worry. I know this guy.  
(starts off)

NICCOLO

Wait--where you going? We're rehearsing.

LUIGI

(stops)

I'm not ready to rehearse. I need to be alone with this guy.

NICCOLO

Please. Trust me. We need to rehearse. So we all know what we're doing when it's time to do it.

LUIGI

Look. I gotta do this my way. Or it's no way. Understand? I got a process. I'll be ready when I'm ready.

(LUIGI walks off, as "Ligurio.")

LUIGI

(as he goes)

"I don't think there's anyone in the whole world as stupid as this guy."

NICCOLO

(to himself)

"As him."

(alone)

We're doomed. There's no way we can pull this off. Right there in front of the cardinal. Disgrace. Humiliation. I'll be gone for good. Goodbye Florence. Goodbye world. I'll lose the house. I'll be out on my ass. I'll starve to death. On a lonely road, out in the middle of nowhere.

(calls out)

Can we please rehearse?

(Blackout.)

4 SHOWTIME

4

(The distant bell clangs eight o'clock.

Night.

Back in the palace.

After dinner.

Music plays in the room next door.

ZENOBIA and BATTISTA, now in masks and costume, enter through opposite doors, meet together in the moonlight.

The masks come off.)

ZENOBIA

Where's Luigi?

BATTISTA

He's all set to go.

ZENOBIA

Where's writer-guy?

BATTISTA

I don't know. He's around.

ZENOBIA

He's late.

BATTISTA

No, he's not, I saw him out there. Don't worry.

ZENOBIA

I don't like it.

BATTISTA

What?

ZENOBIA

He should be here. We're supposed to start. It's eight o'clock.

BATTISTA

Relax. He'll be here.

ZENOBIA

What if he says something?

BATTISTA

Like what? I thought you said he didn't have a clue.

\*

ZENOBIA

I know what I said.  
(beat)  
Now I'm not so sure.

BATTISTA

You said you didn't tell him anything.

ZENOBIA

I didn't tell him anything.

BATTISTA

Then what's the problem?  
(beat)

BATTISTA

He's a chump. He's a clown. All he cares about is his stupid little play. And the cardinal's money. He's probably out there right now trying to get his nose as far as he can up the cardinal's ass.

ZENOBIA

He says he's not political.

BATTISTA

So what?

ZENOBIA

I'm not sure it's true. What if he's on to us? What if he tips off the cardinal?

(beat)

He wants a commission. What better way to kiss the cardinal's ass?

BATTISTA

What did he say to you?

(Beat.

NICCOLO enters, and opens the big trunk.)

NICCOLO

He's here!

BATTISTA

Who is?

NICCOLO

The cardinal! He's in the ballroom. They're all in there. How are you feeling about your lines?

BATTISTA

Great.

ZENOBIA

Great.

NICCOLO

Great.

(he puts on his costume for  
"Mr. Rich.")

Good. We could have used a little more rehearsal, that was barely an hour. But it's always that way. You know what I mean?

(they don't)

Where's Luigi? Don't tell me we've lost him again.

BATTISTA

He's taking care of something. Don't worry about it. He'll be here in a minute.

NICCOLO

You look wonderful. Both of you. You're gonna be wonderful.

(LUIGI enters, in his costume, as "Ligurio," with a glass of wine on a silver tray. He heads straight through the room without stopping.)

NICCOLO

You're here. Good. What's that?

LUIGI

This?

(the glass of wine)

This is for the cardinal.

(LUIGI exits out the other door.)

The others watch.

Beat.)

NICCOLO

Where's he going?

BATTISTA

Don't worry about it. Everything's fine. Go ahead and start the show.

NICCOLO

What about--?

(Luigi)

BATTISTA

Don't worry about him. We're set. We're all set to go. Go ahead. Start the show.

NICCOLO

You sure?

BATTISTA

I'm positive. Go on. Don't keep him waiting. The cardinal doesn't like to be kept waiting.

NICCOLO

All right. Here we go. I'll warm 'em up. Intro the show. Tell a few jokes. I'll get 'em going, and then we'll start. Got it?

BATTISTA

Got it.

NICCOLO

And remember: keep it moving.  
(three snaps)

ZENOBIA

Right. Keep it moving.

NICCOLO

Here we go!

(He exits, through the door, into the  
ballroom.)

NICCOLO

(as he goes)

Ladies and gentlemen, Friends of the Garden Shade, good  
evening...

(He is gone.)

ZENOBIA and BATTISTA alone.)

BATTISTA

He hasn't got a clue.  
(beat)  
You ready for this?

ZENOBIA

(whispers)

Long live the Republic.

(They almost kiss.)

LUIGI enters, urgently.

With tray--no glass.)

LUIGI

Santa Lucia!

ZENOBIA

What?

LUIGI

I spilled it!

BATTISTA

You spilled it?



LUIGI

That idiot Marcello whats-his-name got up from his chair and  
knocked right into me.

ZENOBIA

You spilled it?

LUIGI

The guy ran into me. The glass broke on the floor. They're cleaning it up.

BATTISTA

Get another glass.

LUIGI

I can't.

BATTISTA

What do you mean, you can't? Is there anymore--you know?

LUIGI

I only had the one dose.

ZENOBIA

What!

BATTISTA

You're kidding me.

ZENOBIA

Are you sure?

LUIGI

Of course, I'm sure. It doesn't come in a six-pack; it comes in a little bottle. That's one dose. What do you expect?

ZENOBIA

Well, what are we gonna do?

(Laughter and applause, in the other room.)

NICCOLO enters.)

NICCOLO

(sees Luigi)

Good. You're here. Everybody ready? Places! \*

(NICCOLO moves to his position. \*

Nobody else moves.) \*

NICCOLO

What's the matter--what are you waiting for?

(beat)

We're all set to go. They're waiting. Oh, I see. You're nervous. Stage fright. Perfectly normal. Nerves. Use it. Channel the fear into your performance. Just... look...

(MORE)

NICCOLO (cont'd)  
confident. And don't bump into the furniture.  
(beat)  
Is it the lines? Don't be afraid. You can do this.  
Just...give it a whack.

LUIGI  
All right.

ZENOBIA  
What?

LUIGI  
(to Battista)  
Come on.

(He opens a door for Battista.)

LUIGI  
(the first line of the play)  
"After you, Mr. Callimaco."

(BATTISTA gives ZENOBIA a look, and  
exits through the door.)

LUIGI exits, closing the door behind.)

NICCOLO  
(to Zenobia)  
Are you and him--?

ZENOBIA  
That's none o' your business.

NICCOLO  
Of course not. No matter, we're off and running. You're  
great. All three of you. We can do this.  
(re the audience)  
They loved my monolog. I killed 'em.

(He listens with his ear to the door.)

Distant laughter.)

NICCOLO  
They're laughing. They like it.  
(keeps listening)  
What are they saying?  
(more laughter)  
They're improvising.  
(more laughter)  
Oh, my God.

(BATTISTA enters, terrified.)

NICCOLO  
What's going on out there?

BATTISTA  
They're laughing.

NICCOLO  
Stick to the script!

BATTISTA  
The cardinal's laughing his ass off.

NICCOLO  
Really?

BATTISTA  
Luigi's really funny.

NICCOLO  
You can't just make stuff up!

BATTISTA  
They love him.

ZENOBIA  
(to Niccolo)  
Hey, aren't you supposed to be--?

NICCOLO  
Huh? Oh, shit. I'm on!

(He opens a door.)

NICCOLO  
(as Mr. Rich)  
"Ah, Ligurio, there you are! I've been looking for you..."

(Door closes--he's gone.)

BATTISTA and ZENOBIA, alone.)

ZENOBIA  
What are we doing?

BATTISTA  
It's scary out there.

ZENOBIA  
Are we just making this up as we go?

BATTISTA  
He's out there. We gotta do it.

Do what? ZENOBIA

Plan B. We just need a few...you know.  
(weapons) BATTISTA

You mean... ZENOBIA

Everybody's waiting. It's now or never.  
(beat) BATTISTA

Then let's do it. ZENOBIA

You sure? BATTISTA

All the way. ZENOBIA

I need five minutes. You're next, right? BATTISTA

What are you gonna do? ZENOBIA

We're gonna kill that fucker.  
(beat) BATTISTA

Go. I got this. ZENOBIA

I'll be right back. BATTISTA

You better be. ZENOBIA

(Beat.)

BATTISTA heads off through the garden.

ZENOBIA puts her ear to the door.

NICCOLO enters through the other door to the sound of laughter in the other room.)

NICCOLO

They love him. The cardinal is laughing his ass off!

(He quickly changes costumes into "The Priest.")

NICCOLO

I don't know what play Luigi's doing, but they think he's hilarious. He's just making it up. Extemporaneously. I don't care. As long as they're laughing. The cardinal is laughing his ass off. He's a big laugher. He's got one of those laughs, you know?

(laughter off)

There he is. You hear him? He loves it. We're a hit! Where's Battista?

ZENOBIA

He's busy. He'll be right back.

NICCOLO

He's busy? What do you mean, he's busy?

ZENOBIA

Don't worry, he'll be here.

NICCOLO

Are you ready for your scene?

ZENOBIA

Yeah, I'm ready. Don't I look like I'm ready?

NICCOLO

You look wonderful. They're gonna love you.

(BATTISTA returns with three huge daggers.)

NICCOLO

What's that?

BATTISTA

What's what? These? These are just...you know.  
(gives one of the daggers to Zenobia)

Here.

NICCOLO

Are those real?

(They turn and face NICCOLO, daggers in hand.)

NICCOLO

What are you doing?

BATTISTA

We gotta a little job to do. Understand?

NICCOLO

A little job? What do you mean? You mean... You mean...

BATTISTA

You're not gonna be a problem, are you?

NICCOLO

Uh...

ZENOBIA

You wanna be with us.

BATTISTA

You don't wanna be against us.

NICCOLO

You're not serious. You mean...out there...right now...with those?

(the daggers)

What are you gonna do?

(grim stares)

Not the cardinal.

(beat)

You're gonna whack the cardinal?

ZENOBIA

Shut up.

BATTISTA

He goes. And we move.

NICCOLO

We who?

BATTISTA

We got guys in the square, at the Bargello, all over the city, just waiting for the signal. Then...all at once. We take it. And it's ours.

ZENOBIA

And we bring back the Republic. Cause we're Florence. It's in our blood. Freedom. Long live the Republic.

(BATTISTA and ZENOBIA almost kiss.)

NICCOLO

What about the play?

BATTISTA

Forget about your stupid little play. This is our lives.  
This is who we are.

ZENOBIA

You wanna live your life down on your knees?

BATTISTA

Begging for scraps at the cardinal's table, the Medici tit?

ZENOBIA

Fuck the Medici.

BATTISTA

Don't be a sucker. The cardinal is never gonna give you that  
history book deal.

ZENOBIA

No way. You?

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BATTISTA

Forget about it. Trust me on that.

ZENOBIA

(to Niccolo)

You with us or not, writer-guy?

(Beat.

Hands on daggers.

Laughter in the other room.)

NICCOLO

What do you want me to do?

ZENOBIA

That's my guy. I knew it. I read your book.

NICCOLO

Did you read the part about conspiracies?

BATTISTA

Enough about books. Here's what you're gonna do: When I  
give you the signal, you run out there, and go up to the  
balcony--the one up the stairs out there, the one that looks  
out on the square--and relay the signal to my guy Luca.

NICCOLO

Relay the signal?



BATTISTA  
That's right.

NICCOLO  
And what's the signal?

BATTISTA  
Long live the Republic.

NICCOLO  
Long live the Republic. Then what?

BATTISTA  
Just shout it out. Really loud. He'll hear ya. His guys'll move on the palace, Benni hits the Bargello, and on down the line. All at once...*Basta, finito.*

(ZENOBIA offers NICCOLO the third dagger.)

ZENOBIA  
Well?

(Reluctantly, NICCOLO accepts the dagger.)

ZENOBIA  
(to Battista)  
Let's do it.

(ZENOBIA takes her position, dagger in hand, by one door.

BATTISTA takes his position, dagger in hand, by the other.)

BATTISTA  
(a count down, whispering)  
Three, two, one, go!

(BATTISTA and ZENOBIA exit through the opposite doors at the same time, concealing their daggers behind their backs.

Beat.

NICCOLO waits, frozen in anticipation, with the third dagger in hand.

We hear laughter in the other room.)

NICCOLO

(to himself)

What's taking so long? I should just leave. Just get outta here. But what if they pull it off? They'll come after me. Then again, what if they fail? I'll be implicated. I'm screwed either way.

(looks up)

Why are you doing this to me?

BATTISTA

(off stage)

Long live the Republic!

(The audience gasps.

A man screams.

Someone shouts "Alarm!"

Hubbub ensues.

LUIGI enters, desperate, stops.

Sees the dagger in Niccolo's hand.)

LUIGI

What are you gonna do with that?

(NICCOLO looks at the dagger.

Beat.)

NICCOLO

Somebody needs to go up to the balcony, and relay the signal.

(Beat.

More shouts, hubbub in the ballroom.

LUIGI dashes off into the garden.

NICCOLO considers his options.

He starts out the door to the garden.

But he stops, and turns back.

A woman screams, off stage--Zenobia?

He heads out the door to the balcony.

The hubbub crescendoes.

Blackout.)

5 JUDGEMENT

5

(Lights up, sometime later, somewhere in the bowels of the Old Palace,

NICCOLO enters, still dressed as a priest, but now his wrists are shackled.

He steps into a spotlight, and looks around, at the audience, the "Signory," the ruling council of Florence, his judges now.)

NICCOLO

Most illustrious lords, and my very particular masters. Well, here I am again. Before you, once again. Still in the silly costume I was arrested in, a silly costume in a foolish play. I meant no disrespect. Yes, here I am again. Not the way I was hoping to return here, to the town where I was born, to the halls of the Old Palace, these halls I love as I love my life. Damn me if you will, but I love this old place. The beating heart of our homeland. Unlike anywhere else in the world. Our country. Florence. And, here I am again.

(in shackles)

"There is no enterprise riskier than conspiracy to seize hold of a state, suddenly, by force. Many have tried. Very few succeed." I know this. Do you really think I would be so foolish, so impetuous, so naive as to participate in a stunt like this? I was forced into this plot. You must know that.

(ZENOBIA and BATTISTA enter separately, and kneel in separate spotlights, their wrists bound, hands folded in prayer, before execution.)

NICCOLO

(to the audience)

I expect I know what your judgement upon Mr. Della Palla and Miss Buondelmonte will be.

(The two doomed prisoners await execution.)

BATTISTA

I loved you, Zenobia.

ZENOBIA

That's nice.

BATTISTA

I'm sorry.

ZENOBIA  
I'm not.

(Sound of the headsman's ax.  
Spot out on Battista.)

NICCOLO  
The headsman's ax.

(A moment of eye contact between  
ZENOBIA and NICCOLO.)

ZENOBIA  
(quietly)  
Long live the Republic.

(Sound of the headsman's ax.  
Spot out on Zenobia.)

NICCOLO  
As God in Heaven is my witness, I swear to you, I had no hand  
in this conspiracy. I was an innocent pawn in this plot.  
Nothing more. What would I have stood to gain in this  
amateurish scheme?

(beat)  
Concerning the whereabouts of Mr. Alamanni, I'm afraid I  
can't help you there. Though I heard--mind you, I only heard  
it, from one of the other "guests" in the Bargello--as they  
led him past my cell--I didn't catch his name--but he said  
Luigi made it to Rome, where he's taken up a new line of  
work.

(Enter LUIGI, in a spotlight, at a mic  
on a stand.)

LUIGI  
(as a stand-up comic)  
Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Have I gotta pain! I  
told the doctor, I says Doc, it hurts like a son-of-bitch

(reaches up)  
The doctor says, "So don't do that!"

(Rim shot.  
Sound of an audience laughing.)

LUIGI  
I'll be here all weekend, ladies and gentlemen...

(Spotlight out--Luigi's gone.)

NICCOLO

(to the Signory)

This wasn't my idea. I had nothing to do with this. I was only there to put on a silly little play. An entertainment. A few laughs. For a small fee. A very small fee--that I was never paid, let me point out. I knew nothing about a plot to kill Cardinal de Medici. And I'm delighted to learn His Eminence was unharmed.

(crosses himself)

God protect Cardinal de Medici. I had no hand in this. I'm just a humble, harmless...little...playwright.

(beat)

Don't execute me. I'll admit, there are things I should be punished for. Maybe I should be whipped for writing that stupid little play. Or worse, for my ambition to humbly serve the good people of this magnificent town of ours, all my life. Maybe I should dance on the strappado for that, one more time...But the ax? Really?

(beat)

Do what you will with me, but lemme ask you this: is that History Commission still up for grabs? Just wanna throw my hat in the ring for that. I could do a hell of a job on the History of Florence. What do you say? Come on...have a heart.

(Blackout.)

BASTA FINITO!

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