

THE PRINCE

(a play about the life and times
of Niccolo Machiavelli in five parts)

Part 3: The Contest

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Draft 1: 4/9/21
Revised: 7/14/21
Revised: 5/14/23
Revised: 11/6/23
Revised: 1/22/24 (1st reading)
Revised: 5/4/24 (1st Script Session)
Revised: 6/16/24 (2nd Script Session)
Revised: 9/16/24 (1st rehearsal)
Revised: 10/11/24 (Tech)

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Berkeley City Club
2315 Durant Ave.
Berkeley CA 94704
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI: Chancellor of the Signory, a political "fixer" for the ruling committee of the Republic of Florence.

LEONARDO DA VINCI: on the cusp of old age.

MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI: coming into his own.

SETTING

Various locations around Florence, Italy, 1504.

NOTE

Though we are in the High Renaissance of Italy, they dress as if it were just yesterday.

... indicates a pause, or a "trail off"
-- indicates an interruption, a "cut off"
/ indicates an overlap with the next line

THE PARTS

- I. THE MONK (Savonarola)
- II. THE BULL (Cesare Borgia)
- III. THE CONTEST (Leonardo and Michelangelo)
- IV. THE PRINCE (the book)
- V. MONDRAGOLA (the comedy)

"PART THREE: THE CONTEST"

1 A COMMISSION

1 *

(April 1st, 1504. *

About a year after the affair
with Cesare Borgia.

Reveal NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI, at
the height of his career.

He speaks directly to us.)

NICCOLO

We have a tradition here. When we want the best--when we want something to be truly great--we have the best compete for it, against one another, in order to...motivate them...to do their very best. Dante, you may remember, mentions how Cimabue competed with Giotto over the Madonna Enthroned, Brunelleschi competed with Ghiberti for the commission to adorn the doors of the Baptistry. It's an old tradition here. It's how we get our money's worth when we're funding projects in the most glorious city in the world.

(He exits.

Lights change.

6 months earlier. *

LEONARDO DA VINCI, later in life,
enters a spotlight. He is
dressed flamboyantly.

He looks at something on a square
in Florence, pondering some
mystery of the universe.

Across the square, MICHELANGELO
BUONARROTI, much younger, steps
into a different spotlight. He
is dressed like a workman, his
clothes worn, unkempt, stained
with paint and marble dust.

The younger man spots the older
across the square.)

MICHELANGELO

Hey! Old man! You ever finish that big horse in Milan?

(He laughs. Big.)

LEONARDO

Why don't you beg for a handout over by the bridge? You'd likely do better there.

(The two rivals just glare at each other.)

Thunder cracks.

Blackout.

The sound of a torrential downpour.

The rain fades away.

Birds tweet.

Sunlight beams in through a window in the Old Palace of Florence.

Morning.

Back to April--now the 15th. *

LEONARDO waits for a meeting in an elegant room, overlooking the city below.

He looks around the room.

Bells clang in the cathedral nearby.

He looks out the window at the city, below.)

LEONARDO (CONT'D)

A shitty mess.

(Elsewhere, across the square he sees something he detests.)

LEONARDO (CONT'D)

(turning away)

Oh, for God's sake.

(NICCOLO enters, busy.)

NICCOLO

Hello.

LEONARDO
You need a new decorator in here.

NICCOLO
What's the matter?

LEONARDO
Where's the furniture? Have they auctioned it off?

NICCOLO
You're particularly grumpy today.

LEONARDO
I'm hungry.

NICCOLO
Sorry you missed your breakfast, but we have a bit of a situation on our hands.

LEONARDO
You're late.

NICCOLO
No, I'm not. That was the bell. Wasn't it?

(LEONARDO looks back out the window.)

LEONARDO
It's the streets, isn't it?

NICCOLO
What?

LEONARDO
The streets are filled with shit. Once again.

NICCOLO
Yes, well, the rain.

LEONARDO
Yes, the rain.

NICCOLO
The streets will dry out. Be thankful the sun is shining on your gumpy old face this morning.

LEONARDO
I warned you--

NICCOLO
I know, Leonardo--

LEONARDO

It floods. Every good rain, it floods! And it will continue to flood until you renovate the water system here. You need a water system that takes into account the topography, the supply, seasonal changes, all the vital, and diverse needs of the city--

NICCOLO

Yes, I know all this, you've told me a hundred times. There's no need to harangue me about the water system again. There's nothing we can do about it at the moment. We have a much more immediate problem on our hands. Now.

LEONARDO

Well then, you've come to the right man. Haven't you?

NICCOLO

There's been a...an accident. In Verruca.

LEONARDO

An accident--what do you mean? What's happened?

NICCOLO

The rain!

LEONARDO

What about it?

NICCOLO

Your ditches!

LEONARDO

The canal?

NICCOLO

The whole thing turned to mud, the structures all collapsed--

LEONARDO

That's impossible.

NICCOLO

It's a disaster!

LEONARDO

Were my instructions followed?

NICCOLO

Yes, yes, yes, we did everything you said--

LEONARDO

Precisely?

NICCOLO

Yes, precisely.

LEONARDO

How deep was the trench?

NICCOLO

How deep? I have no idea. Columbino oversaw all of the digging--

LEONARDO

How deep?

(beat)

Don't lie to me, Niccolo.

(beat)

NICCOLO

Fourteen feet.

LEONARDO

Fourteen feet!

NICCOLO

That was the best we could do.

LEONARDO

I specified thirty-two feet!

NICCOLO

I realize that--

LEONARDO

Thirty-two feet, Machiavelli! It has to be thirty-two feet, I specified that! It's critical, I said that, over and over again. You have to follow my instructions exactly according to specifications.

NICCOLO

I realize that--

LEONARDO

Those specifications are all calculated precisely-- scientifically! Do you understand me?

NICCOLO

Yes, I understand you, but we were running out of time, and we ran out of money, Leonardo!

LEONARDO

Money?

NICCOLO

Yes, money!

(beat)

LEONARDO
How bad is the damage?

NICCOLO
It's a disaster!

LEONARDO
Structurally--what's the damage?

NICCOLO
Nothing salvageable--

LEONARDO
The dams--what condition are they in?

NICCOLO
It's gone. There's nothing left of it. Nothing but a swamp of mud, and a giant tangle of soggy lumber.

(beat)

LEONARDO
So it's a disaster. We'll start again. We'll dig to the proper depth this time--

NICCOLO
We can't start again.

LEONARDO
Why not? It's a setback. A minor setback really. It confirms my calculations--think of it that way. This sort of thing happens all the time in science. You just have to get back up, dust yourself off, and--

NICCOLO
Captain Donati took advantage of the situation.

LEONARDO
What do you mean--who's Captain--who?

NICCOLO
Donati, the head of the Pisan cavalry.

LEONARDO
Oh.

NICCOLO
He raided the camp. Destroyed all the stores. Destroyed all the equipment. Set the whole thing on fire. Killed three. Captured one. Tortured him horribly. And then savagely executed him. Four dead men. The whole thing in ruins.

LEONARDO
Oh, my God.

*

*

*

NICCOLO

*

The Ten has just voted to cancel the entire project.

(beat)

I went out on a limb for you with this, Leonardo.

LEONARDO

You didn't follow my instructions!

*

NICCOLO

You should have remained there to oversee the construction yourself--

LEONARDO

I thought I could leave that in competent hands. Evidently, I was mistaken.

NICCOLO

I never should have let you talk me into this.

*

LEONARDO

You wanted to take Pisa without launching a costly siege. I told you how you could do it.

NICCOLO

Yes, "Just divert the river!" Why did I listen to you?

*

LEONARDO

All you have to do is coax the river into doing what you want. First: dam number one, up river. Dam number two: further downstream, then a third, and a fourth, and so on. Five dams altogether, channeling the water into a canal of your own design--at a depth of THIRTY-TWO FEET! Less than that in Verruca, and the bed of the canal is shallower than the bed of the Arno. And the one thing you can always rely upon water not to do is run up hill! This is the basis of all hydraulics.

*

NICCOLO

Yes, it's simple! "All you have to do is move one-point-two million tons of earth!" Why did I listen to you?

LEONARDO

You didn't listen to me, because you're cheap, Machiavelli. You and that henhouse of fools you work for are cheap!

NICCOLO

Shhh! Quiet!

LEONARDO

You've got the money, but you don't want to spend it.

NICCOLO

We're teetering on the brink of financial collapse, Leonardo. This god damned war is bleeding us dry.

LEONARDO

It's not bleeding dry the families of the Ten in there. / Rucellai, Soderini, Vettori--

NICCOLO

Will you please keep your voice down!

(beat)

It's bleeding everyone dry. It's killing us. I have to face the families of those men.

LEONARDO

Which men?

NICCOLO

The four men who died out there in Verruca. Would you like to know the details of how they died?

(beat)

LEONARDO

Why don't you just give up on Pisa?

NICCOLO

We can't just give up on Pisa.

LEONARDO

You just don't want to pay for it.

NICCOLO

It's not that simple.

LEONARDO

If you're not willing to pay the cost of getting it back, why keep at it?

NICCOLO

Because it's Pisa. They control the Arno. The Arno is our access to the sea. The sea is now our access to a whole new world. Two whole new continents. Agostino's cousin is working on a map of one of them. Right now. Downstairs. Across the hall from my office. Have you seen it? There's a new world out there. But Pisa controls our access to the sea.

LEONARDO

Why does it always come down to money with you?

NICCOLO

It doesn't always come down to money with me.

LEONARDO

What you really need to do is redesign the water system here.

NICCOLO

Not this again.

LEONARDO

No one knows more about hydraulic engineering than me--

NICCOLO

Please, not now.

LEONARDO

The streets are filled with shit!

NICCOLO

It's Impossible! Not now. Not after Verruca.

(beat)

LEONARDO

What about...my emolument? *

NICCOLO

Yes, I know, I know-- *

LEONARDO

You're twelve days past due.

NICCOLO

Yes, but we have four dead men on our hands at the moment.

LEONARDO

You can't blame me for that. I have a signed contract. *

NICCOLO

I realize that. *

LEONARDO

Late again. Why can you never make a payment on time?

NICCOLO

Requisitioning is a mess, don't blame me if they can't--

LEONARDO

You signed the contract, Machiavelli--

NICCOLO

I have requisitioned the money, you'll get your money--

LEONARDO

I have bills to pay!

NICCOLO

You're lucky they don't cut your head off, Leonardo, this thing was a disaster!

LEONARDO

Because you didn't follow my instructions!

NICCOLO

All right! All right. All right. I'll get you your money.

LEONARDO
Today.

NICCOLO
Yes, today.

LEONARDO
Twenty-five Florins.

NICCOLO
Twenty-five? I thought it was twenty. Are you sure it's not--

LEONARDO
Twenty-five!

NICCOLO
I'll check, to be sure. You'll have it today. I promise you. Have Salai find me here at four. No, make it six. *

LEONARDO
No, I won't send Salai.

NICCOLO
Why not?

LEONARDO
Nevermind why not. I'll send Tommaso.

NICCOLO
Tommaso--who's that?

LEONARDO
His name's Tomas. I'll send him at six. You'll give him twenty-five Florins.

NICCOLO
Fine. *

(beat) *

LEONARDO
This is unacceptable.

NICCOLO
What is? *

LEONARDO
We're done.

NICCOLO
What?

LEONARDO
You can tell that to your masters in there.

Don't do this--

NICCOLO

(blocking him)

LEONARDO
(stopping)

I can't work in a madhouse. This place is a madhouse. I'm leaving. Get out of my way--

NICCOLO

What do you mean, you're leaving? You can't just leave--

LEONARDO

Get out of my way!

(Beat.

NICCOLO moves aside.

LEONARDO starts out.)

NICCOLO

I wouldn't do that.

LEONARDO
(stops)

Are you threatening me?

NICCOLO

I wouldn't say that.

LEONARDO

Good. Then I'm leaving.
(starts out again)

NICCOLO

There's something else.

(LEONARDO stops again.)

LEONARDO

Yes?

NICCOLO

We want to offer you a whole new commission.

LEONARDO

What?

NICCOLO

No more water projects. We want a painting.

LEONARDO
A painting? What are you talking about?

NICCOLO
A large painting.

LEONARDO
How large?

NICCOLO
Have you been in the Council Hall since it was finished?

LEONARDO
Yes.

NICCOLO
It's now the largest room of its kind anywhere in the world.

LEONARDO
I've heard that. I don't believe it.

NICCOLO
The north wall is a hundred and seventy-four feet in length. The height of the room has been extended to forty-nine feet. The whole wall. One painting.

LEONARDO
Do you have any idea what you're suggesting?
(beat)
Do you have any idea how big that is?
(beat)
Do you have any idea what would be involved in a painting of that size?
(beat)
No. You have no idea.

NICCOLO
Thirty Florins. Per month.

LEONARDO
I don't like painting.

NICCOLO
The largest painting in the world.

LEONARDO
Do you have any idea how long that would take?

NICCOLO
Thirty Florins per month.

LEONARDO
What kind of painting?

NICCOLO
A battle scene.

LEONARDO
A battle scene? Me?

NICCOLO
The victory at Anghiari!

LEONARDO
You're not serious.

NICCOLO
It's the greatest victory in the history of the republic.

LEONARDO
It's the only victory in the history of the republic.

NICCOLO
That's not true! Well, it's sort of true, I know but--

LEONARDO
Absolutely not.

NICCOLO
You're kidding me. This is the opportunity of a lifetime.

LEONARDO
I thought you were teetering on the brink of financial collapse.

NICCOLO
We are!

LEONARDO
Do you have any idea what this will cost?

NICCOLO
The money's already been approved.

LEONARDO
No. A little bit of money has been approved. Enough to get the thing started, but not enough to complete it. You'll chisel and chip away at it every step of the way, because you don't want to pay what it costs to do things right. You, and them--

NICCOLO
Quiet!

LEONARDO
--this republic of yours--

NICCOLO

Will you stop it!

LEONARDO

You're nothing but a bunch of cheapskates!

NICCOLO

Then why don't you get yourself a private commission, Leonardo?

LEONARDO

I'm leaving Florence.

NICCOLO

Again?

LEONARDO

I can't make a living here. I will not be patronized by fools and cheapskates. Get Buonarroti to paint your Council Hall. Everyone loves Buonarroti these days.

(looks out the window)

That thing out there...is a disgrace.

NICCOLO

What--you don't like it?

LEONARDO

Look at it. It's not human. Look at the hands. Those aren't human hands, those are giant sacks of potatoes. And his...

NICCOLO

What?

LEONARDO

His...genitals. It's disgusting.

NICCOLO

It's David.

LEONARDO

No, it is not. It's a monstrosity.

NICCOLO

You're all alone on that, Leonardo. Everyone else loves it.

LEONARDO

Everyone else doesn't know very much about high art, Machiavelli.

NICCOLO

They know what they like.

LEONARDO

You're an idiot.

NICCOLO

(referring to the David)

That "thing" is who we are. We are David. Facing down the Philistine. Facing down the giant! Look at the eyes. That's us. For all the world to see.

LEONARDO

It's indecent.

NICCOLO

He's naked.

LEONARDO

On the battlefield? You would face Goliath--naked?

NICCOLO

Well...

LEONARDO

No, not you. You wouldn't be on the battlefield at all, if you could avoid it--

NICCOLO

I've seen plenty of battlefields, Leonardo.

(beat)

LEONARDO

It should be covered.

NICCOLO

What should be covered?

LEONARDO

His...

NICCOLO

What--David's dick?

(beat)

LEONARDO

I don't understand what they see in him.

NICCOLO

Who--Michelangelo?

(beat)

He's the best. They say he's "touched by God."
(chuckles)

LEONARDO

You idiot.

NICCOLO

For sculpture, Michelangelo is the best.

LEONARDO

He has a warped imagination. And he's insufferable.

NICCOLO

Well, he's young.

LEONARDO

Is that what you call it?

(beat)

Have him do your battle scene. I'm sure everyone would love it.

NICCOLO

Of course, you're the best. For painting. Which is why they want you.

LEONARDO

Who wants me?

NICCOLO

The Ten.

LEONARDO

All of them?

NICCOLO

Most of them. Enough of them.

(beat)

Everyone knows you're the greatest painter Florence has ever produced. That's why they want you...for this. The public will be allowed in to see the hall regularly. Everyone will see this. The Great Hall of the Republic. Show them who we are. At the victory of Anghiari.

LEONARDO

How are you going to pay for this?

(beat)

You're raising taxes.

NICCOLO

I wouldn't say that.

LEONARDO

Are they going to raise taxes or not?

NICCOLO

We're at war.

*

LEONARDO

I won't be a part of this.

*

NICCOLO

We're all a part of this. We need an army of our own in Florence. We have to stop depending on mercenaries to do our fighting for us. That's what puts us at the mercy of men like Captain Donati, or your old friend Vitellozzo Vitelli.

LEONARDO

He was not my friend.

NICCOLO

Or Cesare Borgia.

LEONARDO

Oh, let's not discuss him. I know what you're up to, Machiavelli, you want recruits. You want to build an army in Florence. But we don't do that. That's what's so great about this place.

NICCOLO

If you don't fight for yourself, you must depend on the arms of others.

*

LEONARDO

You cannot change Italy, Machiavelli, she is who she is.

*

NICCOLO

We have to fight for this republic if we want to keep it.

*

LEONARDO

Your republic is just the wealthy businessmen in town--

NICCOLO

Would you rather have Cesare Borgia in charge? Would you rather have Piero de Medici running everything?

(beat)

LEONARDO

None of this matters to me.

NICCOLO

Then go. Find yourself a private commission. I'm sure you could find something. How old are you now?

LEONARDO

How dare you.

NICCOLO

You're getting old, Leonardo. Where will you go? You have very expensive tastes. You and the rest of your...family. I'm offering you the commission of a lifetime.

(MORE)

We want the greatest work of art the world has ever seen. We are Florence. We are the Republic of Florence.

(beat)

Thirty Florins a month.

LEONARDO

Where would I work? A project of this size would require a proper workspace, a huge workspace. *

NICCOLO

Santa Maria Novella. I've already spoken with the Abbott. They'll make the Pope's Rooms available to you. You'll have ample room to live and work there, in the manner to which you're accustomed.

LEONARDO

What about expenses? This will cost a fortune. Paper alone, lumber, lots of lumber, you'll need a whole array of specialized machinery, carpenters, mixers, assistants--

NICCOLO

You'll get what you need to get it done. I'll see to it personally, on a daily basis.

LEONARDO

Five years.

NICCOLO

What!

LEONARDO

A project of this scope will take at least five years to complete. *

NICCOLO

Bullshit! Don't hand me that crap. One year! / We want your full attention on this.

LEONARDO

One year? One year is impossible. Absolutely impossible. It cannot be accomplished in that amount of time. *

NICCOLO

All right, two years.

(beat)

LEONARDO

The victory at Anghiari. You want to see the face of war? The truth of it?

NICCOLO

I wouldn't put it quite like that.

LEONARDO
You remember Sinigallia? That was a victory. Wasn't it?

NICCOLO
No.

LEONARDO
That's the face of war. Madness. Men become beasts in war.
No, that's unfair to the beasts. They become something
altogether worse. Is that what you want?

NICCOLO
I want the victory at Anghiari.

LEONARDO
Two years at forty a month.

NICCOLO
Thirty-eight.

(Beat.

Whoosh.

Blackout.)

2

INTERVIEW IN A BATHHOUSE

2

(May 1st. *

A big, echoey indoor pool in a *
bathhouse on the other side of *
town. *

Laughter. *

A big splash.) *

CARLO *

(off) *

Don't be a jackass, Alonzo. *

ALONZO *

(off) *

Fuck you. *

(MICHELANGELO enters, wrapped in *
a towel, barefoot. He sits on a *
bench, waiting.) *

CARLO *

Hey, Angelo! What are you doin' here? *

MICHELANGELO *

Same as you, Carlo. *

(CARLO and ALONZO laugh, and fuck *
around.) *

CARLO *

(off) *

Shut up. *

ALONZO *

You shut up. *

(NICCOLO enters, in a pool-side *
robe, naked underneath, and flip- *
flops--dark sunglasses? *

He looks around. *

Sees MICHELANGELO.) *

NICCOLO *

Oh. There you are. *

MICHELANGELO *

What's wrong, Chancellor? *

NICCOLO
He's at work as we speak.

MICHELANGELO
Bullshit.
(beat)
Where's he working?

NICCOLO
Santa Maria Novella. The pope's rooms.

MICHELANGELO
How did he get the pope's rooms?

NICCOLO
I think he knows the Abbott.

MICHELANGELO
He's already painting?

NICCOLO
He's doing a *cartone*.

MICHELANGELO
A what?

NICCOLO
A *cartone*.
(beat)
You don't know what a *cartone* is?
(beat)
It's a mock-up. A full-size version of the thing. Before
you paint it on a wall?
(beat)
Are you sure you're up to this?

MICHELANGELO
Perfectly.
(beat)
I accept.

NICCOLO
We haven't discussed any terms.

MICHELANGELO
I don't give a fuck about your terms, I said I'll do it, and *
I'll do it. You can shove the money up your ass.

NICCOLO
Really.
(beat)
You have very little experience as a painter.

MICHELANGELO

What would you know about it?

NICCOLO

Perhaps this was a bad idea.

MICHELANGELO

I can paint better than him. I promise you that.

NICCOLO

(he laughs)

I see.

MICHELANGELO

He won't even finish. You mark my word. He never finishes anything. And everybody knows it.

NICCOLO

You studied in the Medici Garden. Is that right?

MICHELANGELO

What if I did?

NICCOLO

Maybe you haven't heard, the Medici aren't so popular here anymore. And a lotta people think Piero is out there right now, lurking in the woods somewhere, just waiting for the right moment to pop back in.

MICHELANGELO

You have to admit, he's gotta right to think Florence is his. I mean, his old man was Lorenzo the Magnificent. Maybe things weren't so bad back then. A lotta people feel that way. Not me, of course.

*

*

NICCOLO

Are you sure about that?

MICHELANGELO

I don't give a shit about your politics, Machiavelli. I just wanna work. My work. My terms.

NICCOLO

What was it like there?

MICHELANGELO

What--where?

NICCOLO

The Medici Academy. The Garden. I've heard a lot about it.

MICHELANGELO

I was fourteen when my father told me they wanted me in the Garden. A year before that...he beat the shit out of me. When I told him I thought I was an artist.

(MORE)

He smacked me across the face. Said he would fucking beat the artist out of me. And then proceeded to try and do just that. A year later, he could see that wasn't gonna happen. And that changed his mind. He didn't know anything about art, or poetry, or music. But he knew Master Ghirandello, who was a total asshole, but it was Ghirandello who recommended me to *Magnifico*. Even took me there to meet him. It was like I stepped through the gates of heaven. They were like...gods to me. All of 'em. The finest minds from everywhere. The most gifted artists. Poliziano, Rafael, Sandro, all of 'em...I was just a kid. I was fourteen. Schooled by all the saints of Italy. The saints of art, and poetry, philosophy. In the Garden of San Marco. That's what it was like. *

NICCOLO

If you have any remaining affection for the Medici, this commission isn't for you. *

MICHELANGELO

I told you, I don't give a shit about your politics. You want me or not?

NICCOLO

So, is that where you studied painting? *

MICHELANGELO

Hm? *

NICCOLO

In Lorenzo's Academy? *

MICHELANGELO

No, I didn't do any painting there. I was busy learning how to work miracles in stone. *

NICCOLO

Mm-hm. And where did you learn to paint?

MICHELANGELO

Painting I learned on my own. I started painting when I was six. I was born with it. I just started looking at the world. And it came to me. Nature. Men. Women. God. You wouldn't understand.

NICCOLO

Where can I see an example of your painting skills?

MICHELANGELO

I don't have to prove anything to you.

NICCOLO

I wouldn't be so sure about that. Mr. Soderini likes you. But he listens to me. *

MICHELANGELO *
You know who I listen to? *

NICCOLO *
Uh-huh. Yeah, that's a bit much for me. *

MICHELANGELO
Are we gonna do this or not?

NICCOLO

Twenty Florins a month.

MICHELANGELO

What's he getting?

NICCOLO

Hm?

MICHELANGELO

Da Vinci. How much is he getting?

NICCOLO

The same. Take it or leave it.

MICHELANGELO

A *cartone* is nothing. Any fool can do a *cartone*. I'll give you something no one has ever seen before. What's the subject?

NICCOLO

The battle of Cascina.

MICHELANGELO

Where?

NICCOLO

Cascina. It's a little place. Near Pisa. On the Arno.

MICHELANGELO

Near Pisa?

NICCOLO

Yeah. A hundred and forty years ago, there was a battle there. With the Pisans. They were routed. Utterly. You can read about it in Bruni's History of Florence. Late in the summer of thirteen sixty-four, we had an army camped at Cascina. That was when we actually had an army of our own. We were fighting the Pisans. Back then, same as today. A hundred and forty years ago. It was a really hot afternoon. Blistering summer heat. Our guys were resting in the heat. Beside the river. In their tents. Some of them were even bathing in the river. No thought of the Pisans. And all of a sudden, they rushed the camp. All hell breaks loose. The Pisans! Attack! They thought they could take us by surprise. But they were wrong. Cause we were quick to it, we hammered 'em, chased 'em all the way back to their walls, and annihilated 'em. A complete rout. Complete victory.

(beat)

MICHELANGELO

I don't like it.

NICCOLO

You don't like it? What do you mean, you don't like it? Do you want the commission or not?

MICHELANGELO

Did you say they were bathing?

(Beat.

Whoosh.

Blackout.)

3

THE BATTLE OF ANGHIARI

3

(May 1st. *

LEONARDO enters and looks around at the Great Hall of the Republic, reputedly the biggest open hall in the world.

He paces off measurements, and makes notes on a small writing pad.

He gazes up at the ceiling high above.

At the vastness of the room.

At the immense wall he is to paint.

His imagination begins to work.)

LEONARDO

(seeing someone, in the wall)

Who are you?

(beat)

Speak to me. Unfold yourself to me. You are in agony.

(NICCOLO arrives, at a distance.)

NICCOLO

There you are.

(no response)

Leonardo?

LEONARDO

(pointing at the wall)

There.

NICCOLO

What?

LEONARDO

Look there. What do you see?

NICCOLO

(approaching)

A wall. A very large wall. With nothing on it.

LEONARDO

Look deeper. What do you see?

NICCOLO

(closer)

Fresh plaster. White. A great, white nothing.

LEONARDO
Deeper. There.

NICCOLO
What?

LEONARDO
Don't you see it? A face.

NICCOLO
Where?

LEONARDO
A face. In a landscape. Of war. Smoke rising from a city
in the distance. A smoldering ruin.

NICCOLO
Pisa.

LEONARDO
Before us, a battle. Horses rearing up, galloping, raging.
On the horse's back, a rider--horse and rider are as one--a
monstrous centaur, half-man half-animal, wild, bestial, a
phantom of a man. "The first weapons are the hands, the
nails, the teeth."

NICCOLO
Lucretius.

LEONARDO
He strains against a standard, a lance, with a pennant
streaming from it, fluttering in the gusty tumult, a
desperate struggle for the flag, a savage fight to the death,
clothed in metal, armed with blades, man and beast baring
their teeth, animals, biting into flesh, wild horses and men
fighting over a piece of cloth, a dagger thrust at an enemy's
throat, wolves mauling a carcass. Eyes bulging. A dead man
in the dust, partly obscured in the dust, others entirely
obscured, another dies grinding his teeth, eyes rolled back
in his head, clenching his fist, legs broken, beaten down,
empty-handed, he turns and sinks his teeth and his nails into
his enemy's neck, vicious vengeance.

(to Niccolo)
There. Don't you see it?

(Beat.

Whoosh.

Blackout.)

4

THE HOSPITAL OF DYERS

4

(May 15th. *

Distant liturgical singing.

Late at night, in an old church house where he works, MICHELANGELO reads, by candlelight, from a book about painting by Leonardo.)

MICHELANGELO

(reading aloud)

"Color and the Perspective of Color: On the intersection of images in the pupil of the eye:

(turns a page)

At the intersection of the images on entering the pupil, the images do not become fused with each other in that place where their crossing brings them together..." What the fuck are you talking about, old man?

(another page)

"The simple colors are six, of which the first is white, although some philosophers do not accept white or black among the number of colors." Are you fucking kidding me? White is not a color, Master Leonardo, you fucking imbecile!

(slams the book closed, and tosses it aside)

This is all nonsense. I don't know what I'm doing. I can't paint. I'm a fraud. Fuck painting! Painting is for whores! Painting is false! Painting is for children. Stone is the purest art form.

(beat)

What have I done?

(beat)

Don't be a fool. It's just like anything else. Just do it. Do it. Do it.

(beat)

It's too big. There's too much. Stop. Breathe. Listen. *

(remembering something)

You cannot paint the ocean. You can only paint a view of it. A small piece. A tiny portion. What is it? What is it?

(to God)

Help me. I'm lost in this. My arrogance has led me to damnation. Damnation. Damnation. Forgive me. Please. Forgive me. I cannot do this.

(silence)

Nothing. Why nothing? Help me. Please. Tell me what to do.

(beat)

Tell me what to do!

(Whoosh.)

Blackout.)

5

THE POPE'S ROOMS

5

(June 1st. *

A church bell clangs in the distance.

Lights up in Leonardo's studio at Santa Maria.

NICCOLO stands, awestruck, by Leonardo's *cartone*--unseen.

LEONARDO carves slices of an apple with a paring knife, and eats them.)

NICCOLO

Oh, my God. It's magnificent. It's terrifying. Yet somehow...beautiful. Wonderful. And this is full size?

LEONARDO

No, Machiavelli, it's not "full size."

NICCOLO

It's enormous.

LEONARDO

Your powers of aesthetic analysis never cease to amaze me.

NICCOLO

You said it would be months. Five years, you told me.

LEONARDO

This is just a *cartone*, you idiot. It's a sketch of the thing. A sketch, do you understand? Only the first step in a long process.

NICCOLO

I like it.

LEONARDO

I'm so pleased. The roof leaks.

NICCOLO

Hm?

LEONARDO

The roof leaks. It has to be fixed.

NICCOLO

Oh. Hm. Where?

LEONARDO

(pointing)

Right there. Do you see it?

(MORE)

(faint sound of dripping)
Water. Leaking from the roof.

NICCOLO
Oh. Yes. That. Yes, I see that.

LEONARDO
It has to be repaired.

NICCOLO
Of course, yes.

LEONARDO
Immediately.

NICCOLO
I'll take care of it.
(noting it on a small notepad)

LEONARDO
I'm drawing in chalk, Machiavelli.

NICCOLO
I'll speak to the Abbott today.

LEONARDO
I can't have it raining in here.

NICCOLO
No, of course not.
(beat)
I'd hardly call that "raining" in here--

LEONARDO
Were they stabling animals in here?

NICCOLO
Hm?

LEONARDO
The place is filthy.

NICCOLO
I had it cleaned and painted.

LEONARDO
Not in here. In the other room. Where I have to sleep. It smells like a stable in there. No wonder the pope doesn't stay here.

NICCOLO
Well, it's been fifty years since a pope actually stayed here. That was back in--who was it?

LEONARDO

I need a doorway here.

NICCOLO

What?

LEONARDO

A doorway. Here. Joining the two rooms.

NICCOLO

I can't just put a doorway through the--

LEONARDO

I need direct access from the study.

NICCOLO

You want me to tear down a wall just so you don't have to walk down the hall from your bedroom to get in here?

LEONARDO

It's my study. My study and the workroom need to be connected. Not separate.

NICCOLO

Do you know what that will cost?

LEONARDO

It's essential for the success of the project.

NICCOLO

(noting it)

Essential. Noted.

LEONARDO

And I need some plants.

NICCOLO

Plants?

LEONARDO

Yes, big ones. In pots. Ferns. A date palm.

NICCOLO

A date palm? Where will I get a--?

LEONARDO

Speak to Romulus of Medina. On the Old Bridge. He's got them. Gorgeous. They clean the air. And bring life into the room.

NICCOLO

Very well, potted plants. Also noted.

LEONARDO

The light is good. The room must be airy, sunlit, spacious, above and below. I like the quiet here.

NICCOLO

So, the *cartone* is done, what's next?

LEONARDO

It's not done. I've barely even started it.

NICCOLO

Oh. Really?

(looks at it)

Oh. Yes. I see. It needs more detail. Fill in some of those...spaces? Like there?

LEONARDO

Please. Stop.

(beat)

What is it you want?

NICCOLO

I just want to know how it's coming. When the *cartone's* done, then what?

LEONARDO

This is going to cost a lot of money.

NICCOLO

What do you mean a lot--how much?

LEONARDO

A lot. The scaffolding alone is immense. You'll see my drawings...in the study. I'd show you, but I'd have to hike through the church to get to them--do you see the problem with the spacial layout here?

NICCOLO

Yes, yes, I understand, I've got it noted. One doorway through an existing wall.

(showing him the notepad)

"Essential!" I've already budgeted for scaffolding. It shouldn't be a problem.

LEONARDO

You'd better see my drawings.

NICCOLO

I will see your drawings, and I will see they're followed precisely, I assure you--

LEONARDO

I need a very special crane constructed.

NICCOLO

A crane?

LEONARDO

Yes, you'll see, / I've got complete drawings--

NICCOLO

(to himself)

You've got very precise drawings for it. Of course.

LEONARDO

Exactly.

NICCOLO

Anything else?

LEONARDO

Yes, there are wardrobe expenses.

NICCOLO

Wardrobe expenses?

LEONARDO

Yes. I have to wear clothes, don't I?

NICCOLO

You're wearing clothes right now.

LEONARDO

Brilliant observation, Chancellor.

NICCOLO

Expensive clothes, I might add. You have more clothes than a Borgia Pope.

LEONARDO

Unlike you, I am who I am. And I dress accordingly. It's essential.

NICCOLO

I'll never get "wardrobe expenses" approved--

LEONARDO

For my staff, as well.

NICCOLO

Your staff? What staff? Who's that German kid?

LEONARDO

That's Matteus. And he's no child.

NICCOLO

So that's Salai, Tomas, and now Matteus?

LEONARDO

Yes. All of us. We must be clothed appropriately.

NICCOLO

A wardrobe allowance for the whole family?

LEONARDO

If you like.

(beat)

NICCOLO

All right. I'll do what I can. The roof, the wall, the plants, the clothes, all of it.

LEONARDO

You're kidding.

NICCOLO

But first...something's come up.

LEONARDO

What?

NICCOLO

It's Pisa again.

LEONARDO

Oh, God.

NICCOLO

I tried to talk them out of this, but it's unavoidable--

LEONARDO

What--who? What is it?

NICCOLO

I'm sorry. We need you to go to Piombino.

LEONARDO

Piombino? What?

NICCOLO

Immediately.

LEONARDO

Immediately?

(beat)

Why didn't you tell me this?

NICCOLO

I'm telling you now. And I know you'll be angry--

LEONARDO
(angry)

Leave now?!

NICCOLO
I knew it--you're angry. *

LEONARDO
I just got started here. We're making excellent progress.
Your horse is off and running! And you're sending me to
Piombino?

NICCOLO *

I'm sorry. *

LEONARDO *

Why? What on earth could possibly be so important in Piombino?

NICCOLO

D'Appiano's guy arrived this morning.

LEONARDO

And?

NICCOLO

We could lose him.

LEONARDO

D'Appiano?

(beat)

To Pisa?

NICCOLO

We... they... the Ten. They made a promise to d'Appiano.

LEONARDO

A promise of what?

NICCOLO

Piombino is critical to our security--

LEONARDO

I know that.

NICCOLO

We can't lose d'Appiano to Pisa. He almost went over to
Genoa.

LEONARDO

That doesn't surprise me, who would want to align themselves
with the Ten of Florence and you!

NICCOLO

Don't blame me for this, Soderini promised the old fuck we'd renovate his fortifications, if he would renew his agreement with us. That was over a year ago. Now we have to make good on it. Immediately. Or else.

LEONARDO
Do you know how long that could take?

NICCOLO
Well...

LEONARDO
Renovate his fortifications?

NICCOLO
It depends.

LEONARDO
Those fortifications are massive. That could take years.

NICCOLO
It depends on how long you need to remain...on site. Don't you think? I should think...one...two months at the most should allow you to design a renovation. Don't you think?

LEONARDO
Two months?

NICCOLO
You know the place, right?

LEONARDO
Yes, I've already done this once before.

NICCOLO
Of course you have, that's why they want you.

LEONARDO
Who wants me?

NICCOLO
Everybody wants you, Leonardo. But you're a true Florentine at heart. Am I right?

LEONARDO
You're an idiot.

NICCOLO
He's all set to go.

LEONARDO
Who is?

NICCOLO
D'Appiano. He's got his own engineers, his own labor, just inspect the place, do up the designs, get the whole thing started, try to keep costs to a minimum--

LEONARDO

I am not one of your whores, Machiavelli. You can't lend me out to your detestable friends whenever you like!

NICCOLO

Just sell him on the design, and do up the drawings. How long should that take? Two months. I'll get started on your scaffolding, and your...crane, and your special doorway, I'll even see you get your exorbitant clothing allowance, and we'll be all set to move ahead as soon as you get back. Once you're back here, if they need anything else, you can just...send'em the drawings. Am I right? So long as they're followed...precisely.

LEONARDO

Two months in Piombino.

NICCOLO

It's lovely this time of year.

*

LEONARDO

It's a shit-hole. There's nothing there.

NICCOLO

Oh, come on, it's not that bad.

*

LEONARDO

What about all my things--my family?

NICCOLO

I'll see you have whatever you need--

LEONARDO

You have no idea what I need! I need to be left alone so that I can work! No. I won't do it. Leave me alone. Get out of here! Get out!

NICCOLO

Tomorrow morning. You'll be ready to go. It's not a request.

(beat)

LEONARDO

I hate you.

*

NICCOLO

Sorry.

(Lights change.)

Whoosh.

MICHELANGELO speaks an "entry in his diary.")

MICHELANGELO

June third. I decided to see for myself. This "cartoon" of his. Everybody's talking about it. But nobody's actually seen it. They say it's hanging in the pope's rooms at Santa Maria. So I decided to go in and have a look at it for myself. See what all the fuss is about. *

(Gregorian chants.)

And while the brothers were at Vespers, I slipped through the cloister and found an open door.

(lights a candle)

I took a candle from an alcove, and went looking for the pope's rooms. But I had no idea where to look. I went all over the place, up and down, back and forth. It's a miracle no one saw me. A miracle.

(whispering)

Guide me.

(he sees the cartone)

And there it was. It's immense. I was all alone with it in there. Candle in my hand. Like Dante in his journey down below, a lone soul in a vast cavern, lit only by a tiny candleflame. Oh, my God.

(sinks to his knees)

And it came to me. This is horror. This is war. Why? Why a war? No. Now I understand.

(Blackout.)

Whoosh.)

6

PIOMBINO

6

(July 1st. In darkness.)

*

LEONARDO

Slide, please.

(A slide on an old Kodak carousel projector rotates into place--
"cha-chunk.")

LEONARDO gives a presentation to
d'Appiano's court in Piombino--we
might recognize some of the
images from his famous sketch-
books.)

LEONARDO (CONT'D)

Thank you. What I'm proposing, gentlemen, is a fundamental
redesign of the castle's defences. Slide.

*

(cha-chunk)

With the coming of the French invasion, which first began
almost exactly ten years ago, we witnessed the arrival of
modern mobile artillery in Italy. Next.

(cha-chunk)

As you can see, over the course of the last two decades,
we've witnessed the greatest advancement in military design
the world has ever known. Next.

(cha-chunk)

The introduction of modern artillery has completely
neutralized the age old defense advantage of castle walls.
Next.

(cha-chunk)

Now we just pound them with artillery, and they come tumbling
down.

(general chuckling)

Artillery is the key to victory now, gentlemen, the leading
edge in military science these days. In defensive terms, the
advantage of artillery, therefore, must be neutralized. But
how? Next.

(cha-chunk)

Re-think the wall. How do you stop a cannon ball? With
geometry. The force of a perpendicular strike against a flat
surface diminishes as the angle of attack veer's from ninety
degrees--less than ninety, or more than ninety. Slide.

(cha-chunk)

Angle the walls, sharp angles--or better yet--next.

(cha-chunk)

Make the wall round! The circle is the new principal in
defense. What I propose, is to entirely replace the old
fortifications here with an altogether new concept in
military design: the circular fortress. Slide.

(cha-chunk)

A virtually impregnable fortress.

(MORE)

High crenellated walls, and lofty pointed towers are now relics of a bygone age, a romantic image of the past; the modern fortress is a series of massive circular mounds, each commanded by a gun emplacement on top. Slide.

(cha-chunk)

Such as this example. Slide!

(cha-chunk)

Each of these circles is linked to a main, central fortress by covered passageways. Three concentric circles, each of which can be flooded, in sequence, as moats, if necessary, during attack. Slide.

(cha-chunk)

The mound is a kind of pyramid, with the mathematics of the pyramid. Geometry. Slide.

(cha-chunk)

The entire landscape surrounding the fortress should be redesigned, as well, reshaped as part of the larger defensive system. Remove the hills on the east side of the fortress, here, and you will have a perfect, lethal sight-line for defensive gunners. Slide.

(cha-chunk)

Here you see my detailed calculations of the man-hours required for the project, including excavation and removal. The rates of pay are, of course, subject to change, at your discretion. Now, one last slide--

(cha-chunk--it's a detailed
sketch of his flying
machine)

How did that get in here? Slide.

(cha-chunk--one of his
stunning Madonnas)

What the hell? Slide!

(cha-chunk)

There we are. Now. In case you're interested in the latest in offensive weaponry--say, against Pisa--consider this: an array of "mortars," such as these, placed at the foot of the enemy's old fashioned walls--like those at Pisa, for instance--capable of raining down projectiles from above. As you can see, the mortar relies on a nearly vertical trajectory, creating a lethal shower of fire and grapeshot. Extremely effective against enemy personnel. Now...questions?

(Beat.

Blackout.

Whoosh.)

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

7 THE BATTLE OF CASCINA

7

(Also on July 1st, back in the
Hospital of the Dyers,
MICHELANGELO sits on the floor,
with a nearly empty bottle of
wine.)

*

MICHELANGELO

(in his imagination)

Dear Julius. Your Holiness. What is it you wish of me?
What miracle would you like me to perform for you? Raise
Lazarus? The Execution of Peter? Our Lord in Heaven? What
would you have me do? In your service. Kiss my ass, your
Holiness.

(points his ass at the pope)

Kiss it!

(NICCOLO enters, unnoticed.)

MICHELANGELO (CONT'D)

Kiss it!

(MICHELANGELO laughs.)

Sees NICCOLO.)

MICHELANGELO (CONT'D)

Oh. Hello. What do you want?

NICCOLO

Enjoying yourself?

MICHELANGELO

I'm taking a break. What do you want?

NICCOLO

Just...checking in.

MICHELANGELO

I'm having a drink.

NICCOLO

Yes, I see that.

MICHELANGELO

It's coming along beautifully. Now go away.

(NICCOLO just looks at him.)

MICHELANGELO (CONT'D)

I need to be alone.

NICCOLO

(looks around)

Well, you've got that.

(wanders around a bit)

Where is everybody?

MICHELANGELO

I told them all to get out.

NICCOLO

They're under contract.

MICHELANGELO

That's your problem.

NICCOLO

What can you show me, Master Michelangelo?

(beat)

You'd better show me something.

MICHELANGELO

Or what? You'll fire me?

NICCOLO

Renderings? Something. There must be something you can show me. Something I can report to the Ten...some indication of progress. Some hint that you know what the hell you're doing here.

MICHELANGELO

I don't do "renderings." You idiot.

NICCOLO

You think this is a game? You hang by a thread, and the thread is me. / A bad report from me, and your commission is terminated.

MICHELANGELO

I hang by you? You're nothing. You're a servant. You serve your greedy masters. Your business men. And their business interests. I don't serve your masters, little man. I don't serve you. I don't serve anyone. But God. Do you understand that? No. You have no concept of that.

NICCOLO

How fortunate for you. We little men live in a different world than the one you occupy. We have other concerns, yes. We're busy keeping the wolves away while you're making pretty things.

MICHELANGELO

Get out.

(beat)

Get out!

NICCOLO

This is your last chance, Buonarotti. I don't care how much Soderini likes you, if you want this job, you better show me some progress. Or we're done.

MICHELANGELO

Fuck you.

NICCOLO

I knew this was a bad idea. You've never painted anything! You're a hustler. You're a fake. What are you?

MICHELANGELO

I am an artist. In the service of God.

*

NICCOLO

You're impossible. You're an impossible asshole.

MICHELANGELO

Fuck you!

NICCOLO

Consider your commission... discharged!
(starts out)

*

*

MICHELANGELO

When's he get back?

NICCOLO

(stops)

What? Who?

*

(beat)

He'll be back when I send for him. I can have him here in two days, if I need him. And I've come to realize, we need him. You're just not up to this.

MICHELANGELO

You're not a man. You're a weasel.

NICCOLO

Fuck you.

(starts out again)

MICHELANGELO

I've seen his cartoon.

NICCOLO

(stops)

You mean his--? How did you manage that?

*

MICHELANGELO

None of your business, Judas.

NICCOLO

What did you call me?

MICHELANGELO

You really want that in the Council Hall?

NICCOLO

What--the *Anghiari*? You think you can hold a candle to that?

MICHELANGELO

You have no idea what I have in mind.

NICCOLO

What you have in mind. It's clear to me that you have nothing in mind. You're nothing but a loud-mouth phony as a painter, and you're a monstrous asshole!

(MICHELANGELO suddenly grabs
NICCOLO by the lapels.

*
*

A tense moment.)

NICCOLO (CONT'D)

(face to face)

Get your hands off me.

MICHELANGELO

I could take your fucking head off.

(MICHELANGELO releases NICCOLO.)

*

NICCOLO

Who the hell do you think you are?!

MICHELANGELO

I see through you completely, Machiavelli, you have sold your soul to bloated, dim-witted money-grubbers, the masters of your republic. You should be selling carpets in the market square; you'd be a rich man. You really think you can fire me?

NICCOLO

You'll know soon enough.

(starts out again)

MICHELANGELO

Picture this:

(NICCOLO stops for the last
time.)

MICHELANGELO (CONT'D)

Late summer. August. The hottest days of August. In the countryside. An army of men is camped beside a lazy river, out in the middle of nowhere. The heat is intense. The river is cool. The water laps the riverbank gently. Soldiers recline all about, and wash themselves in the cool water of the river. Off comes their dusty armor and leather, off come their loose undergarments, naked they wash themselves in the cool water, washing their tired muscled bodies in the shallows of the river. Washed, smooth, and clean, some sleep on the banks, some lie in the sun, their nakedness open, for all the world to see, their manhood on display, freely, boldly, to all. In God's glorious eyes. In this moment, the enemy strikes. Thinking to catch them unawares, the enemy attacks. Somewhere unseen. We see no trace of the enemy before us. We see only our soldiers react to the threat. Instantly, the alarm spreads through the ranks, and each one of them responds in their own way, each one in a different stage of hearing the alarm, rising up defiantly, ready for action, turning toward their attackers, all in their nakedness, one with a sword, another a pike, a dagger, a breastplate for one, a bare fist for another, all strain and turn against the threat, and charge at them, sending them running, turning and fleeing, run, they're coming for you, and they won't be stopped, it's us, and we're after you, we'll run you down, and fuck the living hell out of you! That's who we are. Look at us!

(beat)

That's the Battle of Cascina.

(beat)

NICCOLO

Get me a rendering.

(NICCOLO exits.)

Alone, MICHELANGELO smiles.

Blackout.

Whoosh.)

8

THE MEETING

8

(Spotlight on MICHELANGELO, he takes off a jacket. And sits, with his back against a wall.)

MICHELANGELO

(another diary entry)

July twenty-first. You'll never guess who I ran into in the Hall of the Great Council today...

(He closes his eyes, and dozes off.)

Lights change to the Hall of the Great Council.

LEONARDO enters and discovers Michelangelo's work on the south wall.)

LEONARDO

What the devil...

(He discovers MICHELANGELO, snoozing.)

LEONARDO (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

MICHELANGELO

(wakes)

Oh. Hello. I was just...resting my eyes.

LEONARDO

(re Michelangelo's painting)

What in God's name is this?

MICHELANGELO

What--you don't like it?

LEONARDO

This is yours?

MICHELANGELO

Obviously.

LEONARDO

When was this commissioned?

(MICHELANGELO laughs.)

LEONARDO (CONT'D)

Machiavelli.

MICHELANGELO

Excuse me. I need to get back to work.

LEONARDO

This is outrageous. Where is he?

MICHELANGELO

Are you talking to me?

LEONARDO

Where is he?!

MICHELANGELO

How the Hell would I know?

LEONARDO

You deliberately deceived me.

MICHELANGELO

I'm trying to work here.

LEONARDO

You idiot. He's got us competing against each other.

MICHELANGELO

What are you gonna do--quit?

LEONARDO

You little prick.

MICHELANGELO

Have you ever actually finished anything?

LEONARDO

How dare you.

MICHELANGELO

How long did you work on that horse in Milan? The biggest, greatest bronze in the history of the world.

(laughs)

You couldn't even cast it.

LEONARDO

You utter ignoramus. You have no idea what it takes to cast a bronze of that size--

*
*

MICHELANGELO

You're a phoney, old man. You're an act. You're a poser!

LEONARDO

I'm a poser? Oh, that's wonderful. And this--

(Michelangelo's work)

What in the name of God is this supposed to be? An orgy?

Fuck you!
MICHELANGELO

This is an atrocity.
LEONARDO

I've barely even started.
MICHELANGELO

And already, it's plainly obvious, you don't know how to paint.
LEONARDO

That's a compliment, coming from you. Take your tortured, everyday reality and shove it up your ass!
MICHELANGELO

Is that supposed to be clever?
LEONARDO

You're a poser.
MICHELANGELO

You should try finger-painting; it's perfect for you.
LEONARDO

You have no understanding whatsoever of true beauty.
MICHELANGELO

You're obsessed with the male form. Look at this!
LEONARDO

This... is us.
MICHELANGELO

Us? Who? This is Florence? This is an orgy of men!
LEONARDO

It's the Battle of Cascina.
MICHELANGELO

You're not a country bumpkin at all, whatever they say. You're a lunatic. This is pathetic. You have the mind of an imbecile. Where is the war, Buonarroti?
LEONARDO

In your head, Leonardo. We are men.
MICHELANGELO

What?
LEONARDO

MICHELANGELO

I've seen your "cartoon." A sketch of butchers in a slaughterhouse. A disgusting vision of human barbarity.

LEONARDO

You know nothing. Have you ever even seen a battlefield?

MICHELANGELO

And you have?

LEONARDO

I certainly have, and it's no bathhouse, you smug little prick.

MICHELANGELO

This is art. What you do is grotesquery.

LEONARDO

This is pornography.

MICHELANGELO

What are you so afraid of, old man?

LEONARDO

I'm afraid of belligerent little toads who think they are God's gift to artistry. Learn to paint before you defile an entire wall with the likes of this idle whimsy!

MICHELANGELO

Fuck you!

LEONARDO

Fuck you!

MICHELANGELO

You want to do something about it, old man?

(Beat.

A show down.

A face off.

NICCOLO calls out.)

NICCOLO

(off stage)

Hello?

(He enters and discovers Leonardo.)

NICCOLO (CONT'D)

Oh. What are you doing here?

(beat)

LEONARDO
You miserable son-of-a-bitch.

NICCOLO
Let me explain--

LEONARDO
How could you do this?

NICCOLO
It's not what it looks like.

LEONARDO
You commissioned him to do the other wall.

NICCOLO
First, this wasn't my idea.

LEONARDO
You're lying.

NICCOLO
No, I'm not.

LEONARDO
You lying snake!

NICCOLO
Calm down.

MICHELANGELO
Would you two lovebirds mind taking this outside? I have work to do.

LEONARDO
(to Niccolo)
You think this is a game?

MICHELANGELO
Ha!

LEONARDO
(to Michelangelo)
You think this is funny?

MICHELANGELO
(to Niccolo)
He's afraid to put his work up beside mine. For good reason.
(to Leonardo)
It's over, old man. Call it a game. Call it a contest.
Call it whatever you want. You lose.

(MORE)

You are yesterday's fish. You stink of tradition. Get him out of here. I have work to do.

(MICHELANGELO exits and slams shut the door.)

Beat.)

LEONARDO

He's unbearable. Why have you done this?

NICCOLO

To be fair, I was only following instructions. *

LEONARDO

You commissioned me to do the north wall, and him to do the south.

(beat)

I thought we were friends.

NICCOLO

We are friends.

(LEONARDO laughs.)

NICCOLO (CONT'D)

They wanted the best. You two are the best.

LEONARDO

That?

(Michelangelo's wall)

You wanted that?

NICCOLO

I like it.

LEONARDO

You like that?

NICCOLO

It's...interesting.

LEONARDO

It's just a bunch of naked men.

NICCOLO

It's Cascina.

LEONARDO

What?

NICCOLO

The battle of Cascina.

LEONARDO

What battle of Cascina? I've never even heard of it.

NICCOLO

Near Pisa. On the Arno. A hundred and fifty years ago.

LEONARDO

These are supposed to be soldiers? Almost every one of them is naked. This is a battle?

NICCOLO

They're...bathing. They've been taken by surprise, but they're quick to react. That's what I get from it. You can't catch men like this by surprise. We are ever on guard...to defend ourselves... against all enemies--

LEONARDO

Oh, for God's sake. It's just an excuse to depict naked men in a tiresome assortment of poses. It's an army of penises!

NICCOLO

(chuckling)

No.

LEONARDO

It's a dream of men. It has nothing to do with the nature of war.

NICCOLO

We don't want to scare them away. We want them to fight for us.

LEONARDO

For Florence.

NICCOLO

Yes.

LEONARDO

Your state.

NICCOLO

Our republic.

LEONARDO

And Piombino? What was that? All just a ruse to get me out of the way.

NICCOLO

No, no, that was genuine. We had to satisfy D'Appiano--

LEONARDO

You deliberately concealed your deception from me in order to --what? Give him a head start?

NICCOLO

Don't be ridiculous.

*

LEONARDO

What were you thinking? You knew I'd figure this out sooner or later.

*

NICCOLO

I was working on that. What are you doing here?

LEONARDO

Wisely, I didn't wait for your "permission" to return, otherwise I wouldn't have discovered that you were deceiving me like the cuckold in one of your idiotic plays.

(MACHIABELLI chuckles.)

LEONARDO (CONT'D)

You think that's funny?

NICCOLO

No.

*

LEONARDO

Yes, you would think that's funny, because you have a sick, twisted way of thinking about the world.

NICCOLO

Calm down, let's talk about this--

LEONARDO

You want to talk about this?

(beat)

NICCOLO

Everything's set to go. Your scaffolding. Exactly according to specifications. Your crane there. Which went six thousand over budget, but they tell me it works perfectly. Columbino says it'll speed up the whole process. Brilliantly. Of course. You're a genius. It's all here for you. Exactly according to your specifications. Your pigments. Plasters. The whole team is ready to go. I even got your clothing allowance approved. For the whole family. Just say the word, and we'll get started. Monday morning...shall we say?

LEONARDO

You expect me to work. In here. With him right there on the other side of the hall?

NICCOLO

Well...

LEONARDO

Are you even human?

(NICCOLO laughs.

Stops.)

NICCOLO

Yes, Leonardo. I'm human.

LEONARDO

No, you're not. You're a machine. You're like that crane there. Except the crane is more complicated than you.

NICCOLO

We can set up a schedule. The hours when you're in here. And the hours when he's in here. That way you won't even have to see each other--

LEONARDO

Talking to you is like talking to a hammer.

NICCOLO

Just...think about it. Is it really so difficult to imagine? That wall is yours. This one is his. Just...paint. Do...what you do. There. Look at the size of it. Together. The two walls. Can you imagine it? Yours. And his. In the same room. Facing each other. The largest hall of it's kind in the world. More or less. The two biggest works of all time. Both in the same room. Right here. The Hall of the Republic of Florence.

LEONARDO

It's a lie, Niccolo.

NICCOLO

What's a lie?

LEONARDO

This entire stunt. The whole thing. All of it. You. It's all a lie.

NICCOLO

No, my friend. It's not a lie. It's all there is.

LEONARDO

All there is? What are you talking about?

NICCOLO

Our homeland, Leonardo. Our little world here. Where we care for our families while we nurture science, and the beauty of art, while all around us, hiding in the woods of this treacherous land called Italy, and in the courtrooms, and kitchen sculleries in every fort and every castle on every hilltop surrounding us, thieves and cutthroats, and liars, and lunatics, schemers every one, tirelessly plotting to snatch this precious jewel away from us. If you want to keep this place, you have to be willing to fight for it. Or the dogs out there will take it away from you.

LEONARDO

(re Michelangelo's work)

This is a lie.

NICCOLO

You have to admit it's...interesting.

LEONARDO

War is murder. It's mayhem. You've seen it. We've seen it together. War is not a skinny-dip in the river. This is a lie.

NICCOLO

You make a good case. I get it. You're reasoning. Your point. It's persuasive. If we're talking about, you know, what art...really is. You know, in theory.

LEONARDO

No, not in theory. In the world.

NICCOLO

Put it on the wall. And we'll see what they think.

LEONARDO

What who will think?

NICCOLO

The people, Leonardo. Florence.

LEONARDO

Florence. Who really? Who decides?

NICCOLO

Decides what? You mean--

LEONARDO

Who picks the winner? Who's the ultimate judge?

NICCOLO

Well, it's not me, I can tell you that.

LEONARDO

The Ten decides. Your illustrious lords. Or is it just Soderini?

NICCOLO

I don't make the rules, Leonardo. That's the way we do things here. Take it, or leave it.

LEONARDO

He knows nothing about art. And neither do you.

(MACHIAVELLI laughs.)

NICCOLO

I never claimed to know anything about all that.

LEONARDO

I should have known better than to trust you.

NICCOLO

They wanted a contest.

LEONARDO

You wanted a contest.

NICCOLO

It's a tradition. What can I say?

LEONARDO

You should have told me.

NICCOLO

Would you have accepted the commission if I did?
(best)

We want the best.

LEONARDO

It's a recruitment tool. You want to build an army. Your own little army. It's all just a game to you.

NICCOLO

A very high stakes game.

LEONARDO

It's the end of the world, Niccolo. It's savagery.

NICCOLO

I know what war is, Leonardo. I've seen plenty of it. We both have. Yeah, I remember that night in Sinigallia. It was Hell on earth. Murder. Mayhem. All of it. For sport. Sheer cruelty. That's what's out there. That's what we must prevent, at all costs!

*

LEONARDO

(referring to Michelangelo)

He has no idea what men in war are like, what they're capable of, the stink of death.

NICCOLO

The Ten are very pleased with this Battle of Cascina. So far. Very pleased.

LEONARDO

And they are welcome to it.

*

NICCOLO

Monday morning then?

*

(beat)

*

You pick the time.

LEONARDO

I quit.

NICCOLO

You can't quit, Leonardo.

LEONARDO

Oh, can't I? What are you going to do, Machiavelli, break me on the rack? Brand me with hot irons? Gouge out my eyes, hm? What are you willing to do to me? To get your imaginary army?

*

*

NICCOLO

Stop it.

LEONARDO

I'm leaving this foul whorehouse of yours, and you can go to the Devil with your god damned state!

NICCOLO

Fine. You can get your things out of the pope's rooms by noon tomorrow.

LEONARDO

Count on it.

NICCOLO

But the *cartone* stays with us.

LEONARDO

The *cartone* is mine.

NICCOLO

Technically, no, it's ours. We commissioned it.

LEONARDO

But I drew it. And it goes with me.

NICCOLO

Bought and paid for by the Republic.

LEONARDO

To hell with your Republic. I'll see the thing torn to shreds before I'll hand it over to you.

NICCOLO

You're being ridiculous.

LEONARDO

I will burn it!

NICCOLO

You're afraid to compete. You're afraid he's eclipsed you. Afraid you're all washed up. Better to quit than lose, eh?

LEONARDO

God damn you, Machiavelli. You and your Republic. It is no republic at all. It is nothing.

(looks at Michelangelo's painting)

The Battle of Cascina. Why don't you just call it "The Bathers."

(LEONARDO exits.)

NICCOLO

(shouting after him)

I have a signed contract with you, Leonardo! A signed contract!

(He is gone.)

Alone, NICCOLO thinks.)

NICCOLO (CONT'D)

God damnit.

(MICHELANGELO enters, a letter in hand, he snatches up his jacket, and approaches Niccolo.)

MICHELANGELO

Where's your friend?

(beat)

Look, I need something from you.

NICCOLO
Do you mind?

MICHELANGELO
I need my money for August. *

NICCOLO
Now?

MICHELANGELO
Within the hour.

NICCOLO
It's not even August yet. You want an advance? This very *
minute?

MICHELANGELO
I have to get to Rome.

NICCOLO
What?

MICHELANGELO
By tomorrow.

NICCOLO
You want me to give you an advance so you can leave town?

MICHELANGELO
(holds up the letter)
I just got this. A papal guard just handed it to me. The
Holy Father wants to see me.

NICCOLO
(snatching the letter,
skimming)
The Ho--Julius? Now?

MICHELANGELO
He wants a mausoleum.

NICCOLO
No.

MICHELANGELO
Don't worry, Machiavelli. I'll be back.

NICCOLO
You have to finish this.

MICHELANGELO
I don't have to do anything. But I'll finish your painting,
because I said I would. Now get me my money for August, and *
don't bother me anymore.

NICCOLO

Bother you?

(grabbing him)

You insolent little prick--

(MICHELANGELO overpowers NICCOLO,
and locks him in a hold.)

MICHELANGELO

I don't think you understand who you're talking to. You
wanna say no to the pope?

(releases him)

Get me my money, and get it to the Hospital of Dyers by five
o'clock. I'll be back in two weeks, and I'll finish what I
started.

(looks at his wall)

And it'll be the most magnificent work Florence has ever
seen.

(snatches back his letter and
goes, but stops)

Oh. Tell your friend he can kiss my ass.

*
*
*

(MICHELANGELO exits.)

Alone, NICCOLO looks at one wall.

Then the other.

He hangs his head.

Lights change.

Whoosh.)

(MACHIABELLI reports to the Ten of War in the bowels of the Old Palace.)

NICCOLO

Gentleman. Good evening. Well, it's two weeks since Leonardo left for Milan, and Buonarroto left for Rome. The news isn't good. I just heard Leonardo's headed for France. The king has lured him to Paris with the promise of a generous, open-ended appointment. And the pope's got his talons in Michelangelo. I'm afraid we've lost them both. Now, I know that seems a bitter pill to swallow, but I believe there's a silver lining here. First, we've got Leonardo's *cartone*. He managed to slip out of town, but he didn't manage to take the work along with him. And we've hung it in the Great Hall. Opposite the Michelangelo. Granted, neither one of them is...finished. But even as they are. People will pay good money to see the two masterpieces together, face to face, in the new hall. That should be worth a pretty little penny, I expect. And I'm told, that with the right assistance, we could, effectively, finish either one, more or less. The question is: which one should it be? A frightening vision of war? Or the bathers? Personally, I like the Michelangelo. I think it's a better choice, given the whole reason for the contest to begin with. The da Vinci... I don't know. It's too... disturbing?

(Distant cannon fire.

Beat.)

NICCOLO (CONT'D)

Are we under attack?

(Blackout.

Whoosh.)

10

FORTUNE IS A STRUMPET

10

(Sometime later. *
*
*)

MICHELANGELO is in Rome, eating
an apple.) *
*

MICHELANGELO

In the beginning, God created the Heaven and the Earth.

(LEONARDO is in France.) *

LEONARDO

(a letter)

Dear Niccolo, is it true you're in prison these days?

(NICCOLO sits in prison.) *

LEONARDO (CONT'D)

I hear Piero finally made his move on the Republic, dashed in through the Porta Rosa, seized the palace, arrested Soderini, and locked you up to boot. Chancellor no more?

MICHELANGELO

And God said, let there be light.

NICCOLO

(a letter in return)

Dear Leonardo, does this mean you forgive me? I write to you from the Stink House.

LEONARDO

Paris is lovely this time of year. Lately, I've been watching birds of prey. I have a new idea for the flying machine. I plan to test it at the cliffs of Montmartre. My assistant, Tommaso Masini--I think you've met him--he will pilot the device. We shall launch it from the heights of Montmartre, the "Hill of the Martyrs," and take to the air, filling the world with wonder and amazement, and eternal glory.

MICHELANGELO

Let us make mankind in our own image.

NICCOLO

I've been to see the Hooded Guy three times. They think I was in on a plot to kill Piero. So much for the Republic. They hoisted me up by a rope, tied to my hands, behind my back, then they let you drop, til the rope snaps, yanking your arms, up behind you... well, you get the picture. It dislocates your shoulders. They did the same thing to Savonarola. Poor son-of-a-bitch. I told 'em everything. Cause I had nothing to hide.

(MORE)

But my innocence is of little consequence. I expect they'll execute me before Sunday. The axe.

(Standing over NICCOLO,
MICHELANGELO reaches down his
hand.)

NICCOLO reaches up.

They almost touch the tips of
their index fingers, like God and
Adam.)

MICHELANGELO

And God saw that it was good.

(MICHELANGELO returns to his
spotlight.)

LEONARDO

I had a dream once. When I was little. In fact, when I was still in the crib. A bird landed on my face, and stuck its tail in my mouth. Just kept forcing its tail into my mouth.

NICCOLO

I don't understand you.

(MICHELANGELO kneels.

And prays.)

LEONARDO

I sometimes talk to animals. In my dreams. We can communicate. God told Noah, "The fear of you shall be on every beast of the earth. Every living thing shall be meat for you."

NICCOLO

Is that why you're a vegetarian?

LEONARDO

We are most like the monkeys.

(LEONARDO sketches on a pad of
paper.)

NICCOLO

One is chained up, and the other is let go, pry open the lock, jangle the key, and pound on the bars. Another one cries, "No it's too high, I beg you, please, don't!" Those fucking priests are out there every morning, chanting, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera." Comfort to the dying. Fuck you. Last night, I begged her to come to me. Help me.

(MORE)

Lift this curse you've cast upon me. And sure as shit, she appeared in front of me, Lady Luck herself. Who the hell are you she said, and slapped me in the face. Thank you very much, said I. Thank you very much.

(MICHELANGELO looks up at God,
hands folded in prayer.)

MICHELANGELO

And it was so.

NICCOLO

Fortune is a strumpet, my friend. Fortune is a strumpet.

(Blackout.

Whoosh.)

THE END