

IF GOD WERE BLUE
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Representation:

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CHARACTERS:

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

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

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

BEATRICE, Sebastiano's wife (don't bother to Google her because I made her up!), an occasional model for painters, fierce, imaginative, longing for immortality in a culture that barely recognizes her existence, pregnant for the first time. She has big "Venetian red" hair and Jewish heritage.

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

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

TIME AND PLACE:

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

SETTING:

A large room of classical proportions and style. There are windows with Italian shutters. Perhaps there is a projection surface. There is probably a central table, and an easel or two where Michelangelo and Bastiano can review their work. By the end of the play, we will need to see both paintings and a series of drawings—this is entirely up to the director to solve! An almost totally bare stage would work perfectly—leave the rest up to our imaginations.

NOTES ON THE PLAY:

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

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

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

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



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



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

ACT ONE

Rome, 1516. Early morning. Beatrice is standing by the big wooden shutters of her kitchen, wearing a dressing gown. She's five months pregnant. She reaches out and opens the slats. Sunlight floods through the slats, lighting her wild red hair and her pensive face. For a moment she stands absolutely still, lit in chiaroscuro like a Renaissance painting. Sebastiano enters and stares at her in the morning light, before interrupting her reverie.

SEBASTIANO

What's going on?

BEATRICE

(startled) I couldn't sleep.

SEBASTIANO

Is it the baby?

BEATRICE

It's me. I dreamt you were painting me ...

SEBASTIANO

That's nice!

BEATRICE

Not really-- when I looked down at my hands, I was holding a bloody head. Like Judith and Holifernes!

SEBASTIANO

(putting his arms around her) That's just indigestion. I have a cure for that. Come back to bed!

BEATRICE

I can't. Rome is giving me nightmares.

SEBASTIANO

At least they're nightmares about art.

BEATRICE

Do you remember how much we loved the mornings in Venice? How beautiful the light was on the water?

SEBASTIANO

(firmly) You must let go of Venice, sweetheart. We're here now.

BEATRICE

I can't get used to it, Bastiano! When you meet people on the streets, they avert their gaze.

SEBASTIANO

Then stay home and think about the baby! Once it's born, everything will be better. *(he surveys her happily)* Shall I draw you?

BEATRICE

(making a face at how awful she thinks she looks) Now?

SEBASTIANO

A gorgeous Madonna sitting in my kitchen. Add the angel Gabriel and we'd have a perfect Annunciation. *(he starts to sketch her)*

BEATRICE

Poor Mary. You think she had morning sickness too?

SEBASTIANO

Of course not. She was pregnant with Jesus.

BEATRICE

(teasing) You mean, God can't ever make you feel like throwing up?

SEBASTIANO

Bea--

BEATRICE

I sometimes wonder if she was bald.

SEBASTIANO

The Holy Mother? *Bald?*

BEATRICE

Why else is she always covered in that veil...?

SEBASTIANO

Because it's blue! Marian blue! What is the matter with you this morning?

BEATRICE

(looking at him anxiously) What if something goes wrong, Bastiano? With the birth?

SEBASTIANO

Don't think like that! Ever!

BEATRICE

Will anyone remember I existed?

SEBASTIANO

(kissing her) I want you to be happy here.

BEATRICE

(making a face) In Rome? We might starve to death!

SEBASTIANO

I just have to land a few big commissions, and we'll be on our way! Chigi is watching out for me. Soon I'll have enough to start my own studio—hire assistants— I'll paint a hundred Virgin and Childs if I have to... *(correcting himself)* Virgins and children... wait and see!

BEATRICE

(moving away) I don't want to be the Virgin Mary anymore.

SEBASTIANO

But you *are*!

BEATRICE

Can't I be Mary Magdalene for a change?

SEBASTIANO

The money's in Madonnas. Unless you'd like to be whipped naked by Roman guards beside a column.

BEATRICE

That sounds more exciting! Is it for your Flagellation?

SEBASTIANO

(nodding) I can't get it right.

BEATRICE

Where's Michelangelo? He's always good for a flagellation.

SEBASTIANO

(smiling) Don't be mean.

BEATRICE

That's not mean! Torment is his *specialty*.

SEBASTIANO

Poor man.

BEATRICE

Sometimes I wonder why he doesn't just give in to his temptations ...

SEBASTIANO

He can't. You know that. It's a sin.

BEATRICE

Do you think he really *cares*? What people think?

SEBASTIANO

He cares what *God* thinks. And Tomasso of course. The rest of the world can go to hell.

BEATRICE

I wish you and I were more like that.

SEBASTIANO

No you don't. A little compromise goes a long way...

BEATRICE

Says who? You don't resent putting a *lamb* beside every John the Baptist just because some donor insists?

SEBASTIANO

(laughing) Not at all! No one can top me when it comes to lambs.

BEATRICE

(wrapping her arms around him) If you were brave, you'd say "screw the lambs". You'd paint what you wanted.

SEBASTIANO

Then we'd *really* starve!

BEATRICE

But you'd surprise them all! When you and Michelangelo painted the Pieta together—think about it!-- you made something no one had ever seen before. That magical nighttime landscape of shimmering blue sky—and in front, a giant Mary who looks like a wrestler--

SEBASTIANO

She was representing the Church—the rock of the Catholic church!

BEATRICE

And Christ lying prone on the ground like an exhausted worker--

SEBASTIANO

My Marys are so much more beautiful now that you pose for them.

BEATRICE

Maybe beauty's not the point. *(smiling)* I'll make a deal with you. I'll keep caressing babies as the Virgin Mary till we've paid off our debts—but after that-- you'll paint me as Salome! Or Esther! And I'll get to brandish a sword and dance with a thousand veils!

SEBASTIANO

It would be my privilege. *(kissing her)* In the meantime, you must be patient, my love. Lambs or no lambs, we must bow to our pious patrons. Their resources are huge.

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

CARDINAL

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

CARDINAL

And Mary Magdalene's bones are buried underneath!

CHIGI

You don't say! *(beat)* How much are we paying?

CARDINAL

As little as possible! The Vatican is broke. You'll have to make up the difference. *(Chigi moves)*

CHIGI

(exasperated) Again?

CARDINAL

(tendentiously) Philanthropy brings us closer to God.

CHIGI

I'm as close as I need to be.

CARDINAL

Still... now that you have the salt franchise for all of Rome... perhaps you could open your purse strings a little wider...

CHIGI

That depends on how much more salt we can force down the public's throat. *(he smiles)* Who's going to paint this altarpiece?

CARDINAL

(he moves a piece. Thinking) I'm considering Andrea del Sarto--

CHIGI

(moving a piece) You said his Madonnas look like vampires.

CARDINAL

(smiling) Did I say that? *(he moves a piece. Chigi swoops in, takes it)* Damn. Missed that.

CHIGI

Forgive me, Your Eminence.

CARDINAL

I hate chess. So... who does luminous women?

CHIGI

Raphael, hands down. Or rather, breasts down. Breasts up. Breasts everywhere, with Raphael. Why do you think he has so many commissions?

CARDINAL

Because he makes everything look effortless. He might do this one if we made it worth his while ... *(he thinks for a moment and moves his Queen. Chigi watches him)*

CHIGI

You don't want to do that.

CARDINAL

Why not?

CHIGI

You'll see! *(taking another piece)* I keep hoping he'll paint 'Cesca one day.

CARDINAL

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

CHIGI

It pleases me when my artists and my lovers create value together. *(moving his pawn beside the Cardinal's king)* Check mate!

CARDINAL

(startled) Really?

CHIGI

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

CARDINAL

If you thought more about art and less about chess, maybe Raphael would want to paint *you*.

CHIGI

If I were a woman, he would.

CARDINAL

As it is, we'll have to persuade Leo to give him the St. Peter's commission if he does us this little favor...

CHIGI

Michelangelo would kill you.

CARDINAL

(suddenly angry) Let him try. Getting the Sistine done was hell—I can't go through that again.

CHIGI

I warned you, he's a creep and he stinks. And his women look like bodybuilders.

CARDINAL

Narbonne would be delighted with Raphael. But Raphael may not want Narbonne...

CHIGI

Tell him there's no choice! These artists think they're *gods*.

CARDINAL

Sometimes they *are* gods, Chigi.

CHIGI

(an idea!) Fine! Let's invite the gods to battle it out. I say we make it a competition!

CARDINAL

For the altarpiece? Why? That would take twice as long.

CHIGI

And twice as entertaining! Like bear-baiting for the cultural elite. Rivalry brings out everyone's best game. When Bastiano and Raphael competed to paint my villa, the walls turned into a *battlefield*. By the end there was blood on the floor—all for a simple fresco in a dining room.

CARDINAL

But was it a good fresco?

CHIGI

Sublime. *(smiling)* Another game?

CARDINAL

No. You always win. It's very annoying. *(he sweeps the pieces off the board, back into their box)*

CHIGI

If we set up a competition, we'd get two paintings for the price of one... and Narbonne could keep them both if they're any good!

CARDINAL

Well, *that* would please our penny-pinching Pope...

CHIGI

Whom do we pit against Raphael?

CARDINAL

Sebastiano! The perfect chance for revenge.

CHIGI

We can't put Bastiano through that again.

CARDINAL

Why not? I'm sure he could use the fee—he's always broke.

CHIGI

Especially now-- his wife's pregnant and they're panicked about money. What would the subject be?

CARDINAL

Something to please the Pope. The Church is surrounded by enemies—Jews, reformers, the French—Leo wants them all erased.

CHIGI

(smiling) How Christian.

CARDINAL

He's obsessed with Transfiguration right now. The power of the Trinity to vanquish the Devil. How about that? He'll want a stunning Mary Magdalene front and center. And a moon! There'd have to be a moon.

CHIGI

Why a moon?

CARDINAL

Don't you *ever* follow the news? Narbonne just drove out the Turks, dragging their crescent moon behind them.

CHIGI

Of course. And Sebastiano? Same subject?

CARDINAL

No! He's just finishing a Transfiguration – which you'd know about if you ever went to Church. We'll have to give him something... complementary...

CHIGI

How about Paul being converted?

CARDINAL

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

CHIGI

I'm sorry?

CARDINAL

(*elated*) "The Raising of Lazarus"—of course! Another miracle! And-- the French love that story – I believe Lazarus even preached in Narbonne.

CHIGI

You don't say!

CARDINAL

Leo will love it. Lazarus versus the Transfiguration. A *competition*. I'm so glad I had the idea. Make it work, Agostino!

We segue to Sebastiano's studio, a month later. Michelangelo, Sebastiano and Beatrice are facing an easel on which sits a large sketch of the Lazarus painting.

SEBASTIANO

Help me. I can't make it work.

MICHELANGELO

(*guarded*) I just came by to tell you I was back.

BEATRICE

(*warmly*) We were waiting for you to finally reappear!

SEBASTIANO

(*persisting*) Here's the problem. It's going to be an enormous altarpiece—the story has to build *vertically*—

MICHELANGELO

Uh huh...

SEBASTIANO

But the event is *horizontal*. I mean, it all happens in the *tomb*, right? Every way I shape it, the composition ends up feeling flat...

MICHELANGELO

Where's Lazarus supposed to go?

SEBASTIANO

Down here.

MICHELANGELO

(looking closely) And which moment of the miracle are you trying to paint?

SEBASTIANO

What do you mean?

MICHELANGELO

It's such a weird story –

BEATRICE

True. A man has been buried underground for three days. His body is decomposing so fast it's starting to stink... His sisters are in mourning, weeping by the tomb. And then out of the blue, along comes Jesus and --

SEBASTIANO

(interrupting) Read it to us, will you? *(Beatrice crosses to a cupboard and retrieves a Bible. Flips through till she finds that Lazarus story)* Bea is brilliant at bringing Bible stories to life. She should've been an actress!

BEATRICE

Let's see... *(reading)* "Jesus came to the tomb where Lazarus was buried. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 'Take away the stone,' he said. 'But, Lord,' said Martha, the sister of the dead man, 'by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.'" *(Sebastiano looks up at the ever-filthy Michelangelo and grins)*

SEBASTIANO

Sound familiar?

MICHELANGELO

(curtly) I don't believe in bathing. *(to Beatrice)* Go on.

BEATRICE

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

SEBASTIANO

It's thrilling. My favorite miracle.

MICHELANGELO

(troubled) But what if Lazarus doesn't want to be let go?

SEBASTIANO

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

BEATRICE

Not everyone.

SEBASTIANO

(startled, to his wife) You wouldn't want a second chance at life if you could get it?

BEATRICE

I'm still trying to figure out what to do with the first chance!

MICHELANGELO

Me too.

SEBASTIANO

(to Beatrice) You're having a baby! *(to Michelangelo)* And you—you just say that because you live in a hovel and have no friends. Except me.

MICHELANGELO

Do you think Jesus is saving Lazarus out of generosity, or to prove a point?

SEBASTIANO

(shocked) How can you ask that? He's Jesus!

MICHELANGELO

(struggling) No one comes back from the dead. So who was this man, Jesus, who could make such a thing happen? That's what ordinary people wanted to know.
(beat) That's what I want to know.

SEBASTIANO

He's the Son of God! And He's not the problem—I've already drawn Him front and center and he looks divine. In pink. The issue is *Lazarus*.

MICHELANGELO

The issue is how Lazarus *feels* about Jesus.

SEBASTIANO

Why are you always so full of doubt?

MICHELANGELO

(impatiently, to Beatrice) He loves to say it's because my mother abandoned me as a child.

BEATRICE

Maybe it is.

SEBASTIANO

I worry about you, I really do.

MICHELANGELO

Because of my *mother*? Please. Raphael is the happiest man I know, and he was orphaned at eleven.

BEATRICE

(surprised) I didn't know that. How sad!

SEBASTIANO

Maybe that's why he's obsessed with painting Madonnas...

MICHELANGELO

Painting isn't personal, Bastiano, it's about *God*! It's about trying to believe! Don't you see? Here we are, like Lazarus, mired in the dirt, unable to comprehend more than the merest fraction of God's will. We look up every day with blind eyes and we wait for enlightenment! But all we get is an abusive Church that locks people up when they open their mouths ...

SEBASTIANO

And commissions us to paint altarpieces so we can pay our bills!

BEATRICE

The question we should be asking is-- where does the *will to live* come from? I mean, maybe Lazarus has left something unfinished in his life that pulls him back—or he's longing for something we can't quite grasp--

MICHELANGELO

Exactly! In which case... is he reaching up towards Christ like Adam, reaching for an answer from God?

SEBASTIANO

Maybe ...

MICHELANGELO

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

SEBASTIANO

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

MICHELANGELO

(sketching) What hole?

SEBASTIANO

Right here.

MICHELANGELO

That?! You can't squeeze Lazarus into that tiny space!

BEATRICE

(smiling) Unless you called it "The *Squatting* of Lazarus" ...

SEBASTIANO

That's all the room I've got! The rest of the composition is all sketched out-- the Apostles, the sisters—I love painting those sisters! -- and Christ glowing in the center –

MICHELANGELO

But Lazarus is what matters! Without him, you've got nothing.

SEBASTIANO

(anxiously) I'm on the clock! We've been given till December to deliver the paintings—and it's a tough shape, that altarpiece...

MICHELANGELO

It demands more thought...

SEBASTIANO

I've done enough thought! Bea is due in October and we need the cash. They won't pay till it's finished—

MICHELANGELO

(paying no attention) What would you say to this —? *(showing them the drawing)*

BEATRICE

You think it's about pain?

MICHELANGELO

Yes. The desire to live is always painful. *(he continues to doodle)*

SEBASTIANO

Don't say that! I've been trying to cheer Bea up all week!

MICHELANGELO

(to Beatrice) You're not cheerful?

BEATRICE

I used to be. *(looking at the drawing)* Your Lazarus looks like he's not sure he wants to come back to life...

MICHELANGELO

Why would he? Why would *anyone*, if they had to live in Rome? This place feels more like a police state every time I come back.

SEBASTIANO

For us, Rome is our salvation! *(kissing Beatrice)* I promise you. It will be.

MICHELANGELO

(distracted by the drawing) This figure is weak.

BEATRICE

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

MICHELANGELO

(ferociously sketching and re-sketching—now he is hooked!) You've boxed me into a ridiculous corner, Bastiano. Lazarus *can't* reach toward Christ because the hole's too small for his arm! *(he tears up his drawing and takes up another piece of paper)* In this *ridiculously* small space, we have to squeeze in a heroic Lazarus *and* the two men helping to raise him up. You want me to paint *dwarves*? *(Beat)* Give me a week.

SEBASTIANO

Are you honestly going to help me on this?

MICHELANGELO

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

SEBASTIANO

(delighted) I can't believe it! Did you hear, Bea?

BEATRICE

(nodding happily) It's exactly what I hoped for. Raphael won't stand a chance!

SEBASTIANO

Wait till the Cardinal and Chigi hear!

MICHELANGELO

(rolling his eyes) I'm waiting... By the way, why do your color renderings show Jesus in a *robe*? He should be nude, no?

SEBASTIANO

The Pope likes pink.

MICHELANGELO

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

SEBASTIANO

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

MICHELANGELO

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

SEBASTIANO

(laughing) Whatever you say! You are the sun and the moon to me, Michele.

BEATRICE

Why didn't you come back from Florence months ago? We needed you!

MICHELANGELO

I was busy. And the Pope wouldn't leave me alone—he kept threatening to abduct me and drag me back to Rome.

SEBASTIANO

Because you wouldn't return of your own free will. You promised!

MICHELANGELO

I'm not a spigot they can turn on and off.

SEBASTIANO

Of course you are. In the eyes of the Vatican, we're all just spigots.

MICHELANGELO

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

SEBASTIANO

A *fan*! An admirer! He put a portrait of *you* into that painting!

MICHELANGELO

(truly hurt) No true artist would do such a thing.

SEBASTIANO

(chagrined) Okay. It was wrong.

MICHELANGELO

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

SEBASTIANO

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

MICHELANGELO

And me? And I not a charming man?

BEATRICE

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

MICHELANGELO

Why? *(beat. A real moment of doubt)* Why does everyone dislike me?

BEATRICE

Maybe if you washed once in a while...

SEBASTIANO

(laughing) Bea...

MICHELANGELO

It's Raphael they should be wary of. All that talk about *sprezzatura*! There's nothing remotely nonchalant about that man—it's a trick. He never seems to try—but his work is always perfect! How? How are his faces so luminous? I'll never achieve that.

BEATRICE

(genuinely sympathetic) What a tragedy you're never satisfied with what you've created.

MICHELANGELO

What a tragedy most artists always are!

SEBASTIANO

Life is not as bad as you think. We're going to make a Lazarus so powerful it will stop the Pope in his tracks. And then he will shower us with money like manna from heaven, and Bea and I and our newborn baby will live in peace and prosperity!

BEATRICE

From your lips to God's ears...

SEBASTIANO

(to Michelangelo) I'll leave the key on the ledge for you. Where it always is. If you need to get in.

Sebastiano takes Bea's hand and they exit into the other room. Michelangelo carries the Lazarus drawing to the window, opens the shutters, and looks at it in the light. Sighs.

MICHELANGELO

This is no way to make a masterpiece.

On the other side of the stage, Chigi and Raphael in CHIGI'S elegant rooms in Trastevere. RAPHAEL, chic and well-dressed, has entered, carrying a beautiful basket of grapes.

RAPHAEL

It will be a masterpiece, I promise you!

CHIGI

Have you even begun?

RAPHAEL

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

CHIGI

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

RAPHAEL

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

CHIGI

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

RAPHAEL

Spoken like the man who pays the bills.

CHIGI

Steal something from Sebastiano! They say he's done a nice version... at some Church... recently.

RAPHAEL

I've seen it. There's nothing new there.

CHIGI

People don't need *new*, they need beauty! Grace! Harmony! They need a *Raphael*.

RAPHAEL

Don't make me choke on my grapes.

CHIGI

I don't see what the problem is—you always know exactly what to paint. Give the Pope another "Madonna of the Goldfinch" and he'll be floating on air.

RAPHAEL

(intrigued) "Floating on air"! There's an idea. Maybe my Jesus should *float*...

CHIGI

Would we have to see his dirty feet? I hate dirty feet.

RAPHAEL

The Transfiguration will wash them clean! The story's about light, after all-- the sudden illumination of the divine.

CHIGI

It's about delivering the altarpiece to Narbonne by Easter.

RAPHAEL

The problem is...

CHIGI

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

RAPHAEL

It's easier for him-- his story has *action*!

CHIGI

Action is overrated.

RAPHAEL

Not anymore! Wake up, Agostino. Grace is over. The trend today is conflict—danger-- *emotion*!

CHIGI

Not if I'm paying for it.

RAPHAEL

We can't get left behind! You know if it were up to me, I'd paint gorgeous mothers and babies for the rest of my days--

CHIGI

Just paint Jesus having a moment of comfort and joy. Like me when I look at 'Cesca.

RAPHAEL

But how am I going to beat Bastiano? He's got Christ doing a miracle and Lazarus rising up from the dead! *(bitterly)* He's also got Michelangelo helping him out...

CHIGI

What?!

RAPHAEL

You didn't know? Rumor has it Mr. Stinky has returned to paint the figure of Lazarus.

CHIGI

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

RAPHAEL

He and Bastiano are best friends...

CHIGI

Can you even *imagine* what Michelangelo's Lazarus would look like?

RAPHAEL

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

CHIGI

Stop lowering yourself to compete with perverts. Leo needs you. Give him something harmonious and calm. Oh, and make sure you include a moon.

RAPHAEL

The moon is the least of it.

CHIGI

No, it's not. It's about hating the Turks. Trust me.

RAPHAEL

The Transfiguration has no *event*. Jesus turns into God for about two seconds and the disciples promise not to tell anyone it happened. End of story. *(beat. Decision)* I'd like to request a new subject.

CHIGI

Are you crazy?

RAPHAEL

What about giving Narbonne "The Last Judgement"?

CHIGI

We're meant to be celebrating their victory over the Saracens, not mourning the end of the world!

RAPHAEL

But think of the female bodies I could paint, their beautiful breasts floating through the air as they make their way to heaven...

CHIGI

No. There's enough chaos at the Vatican without another *Last Judgment*. Stick with the *Transfiguration*. Your Galatea has the best bottom in town and she's perfectly still. Speaking of bottoms—couldn't you find a place for 'Cesca somewhere in the foreground? I hate to bother you, but she keeps asking.

RAPHAEL

Really? (*dubiously*) Can she sit still long enough?

CHIGI

If you put her in the right position. (*he smiles*) The Cardinal is looking for the revelation of divine beauty, Rafaello. Preferably in blue. Don't disappoint us.

RAPHAEL

I'm disappointing *myself*. Which is worse.

Crossfade to Michelangelo, who is still staring, unhappily, at his Lazarus drawing. Beatrice is standing beside him.

MICHELANGELO

(*erupting with disgust*) He doesn't *fit*! He should be standing, triumphant. But with that tiny hole your husband left me, there's only room for a toddler. I'll never make it work!

BEATRICE

You just need the right model.

MICHELANGELO

But what kind of man am I trying to portray...?

BEATRICE

(*thinking*) He's all alone. For three days he's been in another world—and now suddenly he's back in the land of the living... like someone from a foreign country who's been chained in the bowels of a ship and finally returns to the light—

MICHELANGELO

(*beat. An idea*) Maybe I should try the docks... (*pacing, getting excited about the idea*) Have you ever gone to watch the boats unload, early in the morning?

BEATRICE

I used to, on the canals in Venice. Every morning people sail in and set up shop... sailors unload mysterious cargo... refugees climb out of rickety boats, speaking in

every language of the world... it's an incredible sight. My grandmother — *(she stops herself)*

MICHELANGELO

What?

BEATRICE

Nothing. *(Beat. Beatrice stares at him, then breaks his gaze and returns to the drawing)* I like the way the neck is twisted so the eyes can search—

MICHELANGELO

(frustrated) But it doesn't match the body, does it? The figure has no *life*. Tear it up.

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

BEATRICE

"If then my heart cannot endure the blaze
Of beauties infinite that blind these eyes..."

MICHELANGELO

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

BEATRICE

"Nor yet can bear to be from you divided,
What fate is mine?"—

MICHELANGELO

Please.

BEATRICE

Let me finish it. *(she keeps reading)*
"What fate is mine? Who guides or guards my ways,
Seeing my soul, so lost and ill-betided,
Burns in your presence, in your absence dies."
(Michelangelo puts his hand out for the paper. She hands it back to him)
It's so unfair. You write as well as you paint.

MICHELANGELO

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

BEATRICE

"Eyes" and "dies"—the rhyme says it all. I wish I could do that ...

MICHELANGELO

It's not worth it.

BEATRICE

(thinking) You've found the secret to Lazarus right here. I'll bet he'd be willing to live again if he could "burn in someone's presence"... *(Michelangelo is quiet for a moment. Then he tentatively reaches his right hand out in a pose)*

MICHELANGELO

You think he's reaching for something?

BEATRICE

Maybe...

MICHELANGELO

What's the obstacle?

BEATRICE

Fear.

MICHELANGELO

Of what?

BEATRICE

Of not being worth the trouble.

MICHELANGELO

Maybe *you* should pose for me!

BEATRICE

I don't need to. I'll just tell you what it should feel like.

MICHELANGELO

What if he's still bound in his long white cloth? Could he reach across his body and try to free himself ... *(turning his face the opposite way)* ... while never taking his gaze off Christ?

SEBASTIANO

(from offstage) Bea! Let's eat!

BEATRICE

(to Michelangelo) Show me.

MICHELANGELO

He's looking across the painting, burning for Christ's eyes...

BEATRICE

And resisting imprisonment at the same time. Is that the obstacle?

MICHELANGELO

The obstacle is the pain of life. *(Embarrassed. He tears up the paper with the drawing and poem on it)*

BEATRICE

(startled) No! Don't!

MICHELANGELO

I'll draw something better.

BEATRICE

What about the poem?

MICHELANGELO

(sadly) Don't worry. I told you it wasn't worth it. I would never have sent it anyway.

Crossfade to Chigi's rooms. Raphael is facing him. Chigi smiles.

CHIGI

Have you come to sketch 'Cesca?

RAPHAEL

Not yet. I'm stuck on Jesus.

CHIGI

What else is new?

RAPHAEL

My sketches are putting even *me* to sleep!

CHIGI

What a pity Jesus wasn't a *woman* with pendulous breasts—then you'd have no problem getting started...

RAPHAEL

That is not a helpful remark, Agostino. *(beat)* I need to see the Lazarus.

CHIGI

Why?

RAPHAEL

Competition fuels me. If I could see what they're up to, I could fight back! I think we should break into Bastiano's studio and take a look.

CHIGI

What?!

RAPHAEL

Why not! They're colluding against us—we should at least know how to respond!

CHIGI

What do you mean, "we"? I'm just the banker.

RAPHAEL

(flattering) Banker to the Pope! Inventor of indulgences.

CHIGI

(snapping) I didn't *invent* indulgences, I just figured out how to *market* them.

RAPHAEL

(smiling) "Pay your way out of Purgatory"—it's a generous offer. I just hope those angry reformers don't storm your villa in revenge...

CHIGI

(angry) How else are we supposed to pay for St. Peter's? The Pope is out of cash and out of friends.

RAPHAEL

Never mind, Agostino. I need to talk my way into Bastiano's studio and take a look at the Lazarus sketch. Why don't we take a little stroll through their slum and drop in on them unannounced. Bastiano will be delighted to see his biggest patron. You'll distract the wife... while I flatter my way into the studio. *(Chigi considers. Smiles)*

CHIGI

You promise to put 'Cesca at the center of your painting? *(Raphael nods)* Have you noticed... she has an exquisite little mole on her left temple. Also, I'd love you to paint her tiny pink fingertips... and then, beneath the robes—

RAPHAEL

(smiling) Say no more. *(extending his hand)* Is it a deal?

CHIGI

(shaking his hand) I'll tell her you said so.

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

SEBASTIANO

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

BEATRICE

Jesus could've performed *ten* miracles in the time it's taken you to paint one.

SEBASTIANO

The painting's immense. And beautiful. Wait till you see! I spent all day on the left toe of Our Lord.

BEATRICE

If only He'd worn shoes. Think of the *hours* you could've saved ...

SEBASTIANO

But His feet tell the story! (*looking at her*) What are you doing?

BEATRICE

(*quickly*) Nothing.

SEBASTIANO

Did you choose a color for the cradle?

BEATRICE

What's cheapest?

SEBASTIANO

(*enthusiastically*) This commission is going to open a thousand doors, my love—I can feel it! Soon we'll be eating meat three times a week!

BEATRICE

But if we lose, we'll end up with nothing. Has Michelangelo found a Lazarus model?

SEBASTIANO

He's trying.

BEATRICE

What if you run out of time? Then we'll never get paid! (*just then, the shutter opens and we see Chigi outside*)

SEBASTIANO

Goodness! Isn't that... (*the shutters shut*)

BEATRICE

I think that was your *banker* peering through the shutters! (*Sebastiano looks up. Exits. Bea scrounges around for something else to eat. Sebastiano re-enters with Chigi and Raphael*)

SEBASTIANO

Look who I found on our doorstep!

BEATRICE

(slightly suspicious) Signore Chigi! Rafaello! What a surprise.

CHIGI

(embarrassed) Good evening, signora. I hope we're not disturbing.

RAPHAEL

We were just taking a little stroll ...

SEBASTIANO

(suspicious) Outside our house?

RAPHAEL

(smiling) We thought we'd peak in to see if anyone was home...

SEBASTIANO

How kind!

BEATRICE

I'm sorry we have nothing to offer you. *(Sebastiano grabs a glass and pours the last dregs of wine out of a bottle)*

SEBASTIANO

Have a glass of wine! *(confused, eyeing the two of them)* Perhaps you can share it...

CHIGI

I defer to the painter on my left.

RAPHAEL

(Raphael takes it, amused) What a shame. If I'd known you were in, I'd have brought you some from my own vineyards! *(he drains the glass in one gulp and hands it back)*

BEATRICE

(sardonically) Next time.

SEBASTIANO

(offering Chigi the only chair) May I offer you a seat, Agostino? *(looking around for a place for Raphael to sit)*

RAPHAEL

Don't worry about me! I'll just perch on the windowsill, like a little bird. *(he crosses to the windowsill. Beatrice looks alarmed)*

BEATRICE

Just a second— *(Before she can get there, Raphael moves the covered menorah aside. It's heavy. He's curious and takes off the cloth)* Sorry— let me take that! *(She crosses to the menorah and takes it, attempting to cover it again and move it elsewhere)*

CHIGI

(sharply) What on earth have you got there?

BEATRICE

(caught) Nothing.

RAPHAEL

(intrigued) Is that--?

BEATRICE

A Menorah. Yes. *(Sebastiano looks alarmed. Beatrice places the menorah on the floor)*

CHIGI

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

BEATRICE

(nervously) I bought it this afternoon.

SEBASTIANO

(quickly covering for her) To use as a door stop!

RAPHAEL

(fascinated) My word. Are we lighting candles these days?

SEBASTIANO

Bea's a scavenger. Think nothing of it!

CHIGI

(staring at her hard) Do you use it?

SEBASTIANO

(quickly) Why would we use it?

BEATRICE

(a sudden idea) It's for a painting!

RAPHAEL

(intrigued) What painting?

BEATRICE

Haven't you heard? As soon as he finishes the Lazarus, Bastiano's going to portray me as Esther...

SEBASTIANO

(shocked) Bea!

CHIGI

Esther? *(beat)* The Jewish Queen?

BEATRICE

It will be my husband's greatest work. A study of freedom from tyranny!

SEBASTIANO

She's imagining things, Agostino. She loves to read the Bible—you never know what she's going to find!

CHIGI

And who has commissioned this Esther?

SEBASTIANO

No one—forget all about it. *(eyeing them suspiciously)* So what are you actually *doing* here, gentlemen? Tell the truth.

RAPHAEL

(throwing the ball to Chigi) Agostino?

CHIGI

We were... curious to see whether the moribund Lazarus was rising again.

SEBASTIANO

He will soon! I've finished everything in the center of the painting except Christ's toes...

CHIGI

Make sure they're clean. I hate dirty toes.

RAPHAEL

Are we to understand that Michelangelo is making a small... contribution?

SEBASTIANO

Not small! He's designing the eponymous figure.

RAPHAEL

Really? May one see? *(Beatrice throws a severe look at Sebastiano)*

SEBASTIANO

No. I don't have the drawing with me-- he carries it with him wherever he goes. All I've got is a hole in the painting where the figure is going to be...

RAPHAEL

Ah. *(mock joking)* May one see the hole?

BEATRICE

Why?

RAPHAEL

(effusively, to Beatrice) Because I always learn so much from your husband's work! It's not just his magical sense of color... it's the way he depicts the intricacies of human emotion that I envy. Absolutely... *masterful*.

SEBASTIANO

Thank you, Raffaello. I could say the same about you.

RAPHAEL

(self-deprecating) Please. I have so many assistants now, I spend my days showing them how to puff up their clouds and feather their treetops. For this I became an artist?

BEATRICE

(a genuine question) If your work is so boring, why don't you paint something else?

CHIGI

(pointedly) In difficult times, people crave harmony.

BEATRICE

You think so?

RAPHAEL

(his attention is captured) Yes! Beauty is more important than truth. It saves our souls.

BEATRICE

I wonder. Look around you—what do you see?

RAPHAEL

(looking at her carefully) What do you see?

BEATRICE

Fear. *(beat)* I see fear... like a dark stain across the canvas of the city...

CHIGI

You're obviously looking in the wrong places!

SEBASTIANO

My wife loves to wander around Rome... it's her passion...

RAPHAEL

(to Sebastiano) She should become a poet...

BEATRICE

How do you know I'm not?

RAPHAEL

All you'd need is a nom de plume.

SEBASTIANO

A what?

RAPHAEL

(conspiratorially, to Beatrice) If you could fool the world into believing you're a brilliant young man, soon everyone would be reading your poems.

BEATRICE

Vittoria Colonna signs her own poetry, and the Pope knows it by heart.

RAPHAEL

(to Sebastiano) Where did you find this remarkable creature?

SEBASTIANO

None of your business.

CHIGI

Rafaello! *(Raphael can't take his eyes off Beatrice)* Isn't it time for--

RAPHAEL

(cutting him off) In a minute. *(beat)* You are blessed, Bastiano, to have this inspiration at home! Have you put her in your Lazarus? Or are you saving her for... Esther?

SEBASTIANO

(enthusiastically) She's Lazarus' sister Mary! In a golden dress in the front of the painting, falling to her knees and looking up at Christ, full of hope.

RAPHAEL

How stirring!

SEBASTIANO

It is! And behind her is Martha, in blue and orange, recoiling in awe from the miracle. She has Bea's hands too!

CHIGI

What a shame you haven't used my 'Cesca somewhere...

SEBASTIANO

(eagerly) Tell me where! There's plenty of room, Agostino—perhaps she could be one of the women holding their noses from the terrible smell! I haven't done the faces yet. Would you like to choose one?

BEATRICE

(warning him) Bastiano...

RAPHAEL

That sounds delightful! *(to Chigi)* Why don't you select which woman 'Cesca should be?

CHIGI

But I thought-

SEBASTIANO

And you'll love what I've done with James... some excellent *contrapposto*.

RAPHAEL

Better and better! Go see Bastiano's *contrapposto*! I'll stay behind and entertain his wife. *(Chigi resists)* Why not, Agostino! A studio visit! What could be more fun?

CHIGI

I'm all yours, Bastiano.

SEBASTIANO

Follow me. *(Chigi and Bastiano exit into the other room, leaving Raphael and Beatrice alone. She moves around, awkwardly, not sure what to expect. He watches. Looks at the menorah)*

RAPHAEL

You can pick it up now. I don't care.

BEATRICE

But my husband does.

RAPHAEL

Are you Jewish? *(she eyes him and then moves away with the menorah)*

BEATRICE

Please don't get me in trouble.

RAPHAEL

What a mystery you are! Would your husband lend you to me?

BEATRICE

Lend me? For what?

RAPHAEL

To pose for my Transfiguration!

BEATRICE

No. Bastiano's the only one I model for. Besides—I'm— *(she stops)*

RAPHAEL

Expensive. I'm sure. But don't you think you've posed for enough angels and Madonnas? This would be something entirely *new*!

BEATRICE

You're in a *competition*, Rafaello! And we're going to win!

RAPHAEL

Even so--

BEATRICE

Besides, I've only ever been drawn by my husband.

RAPHAEL

All the more reason...*(beat)* What would it take to persuade you? *(beat. Beatrice is silent)* You could be anyone you wanted to be! Within reason, of course. The Magdalene is already spoken for, alas. Donors and their girlfriends... you know how that goes! *(eyeing her curiously)* In truth, none of the characters seem fascinating enough to do you justice.

BEATRICE

(cautiously) How long would it take?

RAPHAEL

Come to my rooms tomorrow at sunset and we'll find out.

BEATRICE

Why sunset?

RAPHAEL

It's when Jesus transfigures. *(calling into the other room)* Bastiano! I have a proposal for you!

BEATRICE

Stop! What are you doing?

Raphael smiles at Beatrice and puts his finger over his mouth. Sebastiano and Chigi return to the room. Sebastiano senses something has happened.

SEBASTIANO

What is it?

RAPHAEL

Your wife is going to pose for me! For my Transfiguration!

SEBASTIANO

No she's not! What are you talking about?

RAPHAEL

I'm looking for inspiration. She'll be just the thing. And I pay my models exceedingly well. *(Sebastiano is totally unnerved by Raphael's tone)*

SEBASTIANO

That's enough! Bea's my wife.

RAPHAEL

And you're my dearest friend! Won't you share your muse with me? Just this once?

SEBASTIANO

(stubbornly) She's not an object to be passed around. I've never even shared her with Michelangelo! And I'm not your dearest friend!

RAPHAEL

Tell him, Agostino! It will be a lark! I will immortalize Bastiano's wife and compete for the altarpiece at the same time. It will be brilliant! And everyone will win!

CHIGI

You are shameless, Raffaello.

RAPHAEL

On the contrary! I am generosity personified. *(to Sebastiano)* I've always admired you, Bastiano— you know that-- and now – *(joyfully)* I can express that admiration by painting your wife! What a wonderful stroke of fate that we happened to pass this way tonight! Say yes!

BEATRICE

Isn't it up to *me*?

RAPHAEL

Of course. Entirely your decision. (*whispering*) Six gold coins!

BEATRICE

(*stunned*) My God!

SEBASTIANO

Stop it! That's enough.

CHIGI

Why? Better that your wife spends her days in Raphael's studio than wandering the streets buying sacrilegious props. (*beat. To Beatrice*) I suggest you take up his offer, signora. And if you *must* light candles, try doing it in Church instead. Maybe God will save your immortal soul.

SEBASTIANO

Your Excellency... please don't--

CHIGI

(*interrupting*) Your Apostles are top notch, Bastiano. And those women holding their noses are going to be... adorable. Six gold coins will pay for plenty of ultramarine blue for their gowns. (*Chigi bows to Beatrice, turns to Raphael*) Let's go. My nibble is waiting for me.

RAPHAEL

Then who are we to keep you? (*bowing to Beatrice and Sebastiano*) Sunset tomorrow. Think about it. I'd be eternally grateful! (*they exit. Sebastiano quickly turns to Beatrice*).

SEBASTIANO

Bea, what are you doing?

BEATRICE

It was his idea! I had nothing to do with it.

SEBASTIANO

It can't happen! (*picking up the menorah*) And why on earth is this here?

BEATRICE

A child was selling it as I passed by.

SEBASTIANO

On the street?

BEATRICE

(carefully) Through the bars ...

SEBASTIANO

(upset) What bars? *(he knows exactly what she's talking about)*

BEATRICE

How could I say no? She looked so hungry.

SEBASTIANO

That's not your problem! How much did you give her for it?

BEATRICE

Not so much. *(with chagrin)* Everything I had.

SEBASTIANO

Bea! *(beat)* This has got to stop.

BEATRICE

(apologetically) I know—I won't do it again—

SEBASTIANO

And telling Chigi that I'm painting you as *Esther*? Where do you dream up things like that?

BEATRICE

I had to say something—he's such a creep. *(impetuously)* But it's what I want!

SEBASTIANO

Why?

BEATRICE

How else am I going to be remembered? Imagine what we could do with that story, my love! The Persian King Ahasuerus has married Esther without knowing she's Jewish, remember? And then she saves him by foiling a murder plot by the evil Haman. In gratitude, the King vows to protect the Jews from annihilation! It's such a great subject for a painting... shall I read it to you?

SEBASTIANO

No! Are you crazy?

BEATRICE

Lots of artists have done it!

SEBASTIANO

(insistently) We mustn't make waves. Not right now.

BEATRICE

Then *when*? When do we get to make waves?

SEBASTIANO

When we're not about to have a baby we can't pay for! We just have to be a little patient and paint what they ask us to paint. Is that so much to ask?

BEATRICE

I don't understand. Why do they lock up Jews in Rome? That never happened in Venice. What've they done?

SEBASTIANO

They killed our Lord! And why do you want to pose for Raphael? It's a trap!

BEATRICE

I thought you'd be pleased. It's so much money! Can you imagine—six gold coins for an afternoon's work! Think of the colors that will pay for.

SEBASTIANO

I don't care if it's *sixty*-- it's wrong. Leave the Bible in the drawer—and stay away from the competition! That's all I ask. *(beat)* I need to put away the drawings. *(gesturing to the menorah)* Get rid of that thing. I beg you. *(he exits into the other room. Beatrice crosses and picks up the menorah. Begins to cover it again. Church bells ring. Beatrice is startled and looks around, almost guiltily. Then Michelangelo enters, using his key. He stops short when he sees her)*

MICHELANGELO

Oh! Forgive me! I just came by to show Bastiano --

BEATRICE

He's inside, with his drawings... shall I get him? *(she turns around, caught again, and puts the menorah back on the floor. Michelangelo takes this in)*

MICHELANGELO

You're busy-- I'll come back later-- *(he turns to go)*

BEATRICE

(on an impulse) Michele-- *(beat)* Was that you I saw earlier today?

MICHELANGELO

(on his guard) Where? *(he knows exactly what she means)*

BEATRICE

(carefully) What were you doing there? *(Michelangelo looks at her. Beat)*

MICHELANGELO

Searching for the model.

BEATRICE

In the Jewish Ghetto?

MICHELANGELO

Lazarus was a Jew.

BEATRICE

I know. *(beat)* I thought you were trying the docks.

MICHELANGELO

I'm trying everything.

BEATRICE

Do you go there often?

MICHELANGELO

(carefully) Do you?

BEATRICE

(quickly) No. *(beat)* Mostly I just stand outside the gates.

MICHELANGELO

Why?

BEATRICE

I love looking through the bars ... I imagine where the people inside have come from. I make up names for them... and histories...

MICHELANGELO

And then?

BEATRICE

Then? *(she smiles)* I fantasize about putting them in an epic poem. But I'm not sure how.

MICHELANGELO

When I chip away at a piece of stone, I'm never sure what will emerge. Usually, it's something I'd rather not expose ...

BEATRICE

(teasing him back) And then?

MICHELANGELO

(smiling wryly) ... and then I call it Adam, or Moses, and no one is the wiser—

BEATRICE

(beat) When will you introduce us to Tomasso?

MICHELANGELO

(curtly) Never. *(beat. She retreats)* You have to turn things into metaphors, Beatrice. That way, nobody knows...

BEATRICE

Knows what? *(he is silent)* Can I tell you a secret? When I was a child in Venice... there were stories about my grandmother. She had long fingers and wild red hair. Someone should've captured her in a drawing... but she never stood still long enough. She used to dance in the streets with castanets.

MICHELANGELO

How exotic!

BEATRICE

(with pleasure) She was! Like a creature from another world. I think she had escaped to Venice from some former life—but she was gone by the time I was ready to ask...

MICHELANGELO

If I'd painted her, I might've guessed ...

BEATRICE

Guessed what?

MICHELANGELO

What she was running from. *(Beatrice looks at him for a moment and makes a decision to keep going)*

BEATRICE

There were rumors... that she had Jewish blood. *(he nods)* Bastiano is scared my restlessness runs in the family. He hopes it'll stop when the baby's born.

MICHELANGELO

(laughing) And what do you hope?

BEATRICE

(on an impulse) What do I hope? I hope you'll be our baby's godfather!

MICHELANGELO

(startled) Me? *(beat)* I've never even held a baby ...

BEATRICE

Holding her is not a requirement! All you have to do is look after her moral well-being.

MICHELANGELO

That's all? *(beat)* What does Bastiano say?

BEATRICE

You're his best friend. You could teach her to be fierce. And relentless. Like you.

MICHELANGELO

No one has ever asked such a thing of me.

BEATRICE

Then you must say yes.

She smiles at him and then exits. The lights shift. Michelangelo picks up a piece of drawing paper and begins to imagine. His eyes light up. At some point, he begins to draw. We hold on the illuminated image of Michelangelo as we crossfade to the Cardinal's rooms. The Cardinal is in a dressing gown, with his Cardinal's ecclesiastical robes and accoutrements hanging on an elegant rack beside him. Chigi stands across from him; he's just arrived.

CHIGI

He's back.

CARDINAL

Who?

CHIGI

Your favorite painter. You haven't smelled him yet?

CARDINAL

He's in Florence!

CHIGI

Not anymore. He's right here in Rome. In fact, there was quite a crowd outside his rooms last night... gazing up at a naked young man tied to a chair.

CARDINAL

(quickly) I don't want to hear.

CHIGI

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

CARDINAL

How do you mean, “Lazarus”? What does Michelangelo — ? *(he stops)* Please don’t tell me—

CHIGI

I’m afraid so. Our competition is no longer a duo, Your Eminence.

CARDINAL

(enraged) Our competition is whatever I say it is!

CHIGI

Michelangelo has joined the fray. He’s designing the central figure.

CARDINAL

(shocked) Why? *(the Cardinal’s face hardens)*

CHIGI

Don’t ask me. From what I could gather, Michelangelo was in the midst of some kind of artistic experiment last night. The man was standing fully undressed in the window. At around midnight. Lit from behind.

CARDINAL

How do you know?

CHIGI

Me? *(caught)* I happened to wander by!

CARDINAL

This is a disgrace. *(beat)* Danilo is late. Help me dress for Vespers. *(he slips off his robe and crosses to a low platform)* Am I going to have to arrest them?

CHIGI

That’s up to you.

CARDINAL

Just what I need. More debauchery. Start with the cassock. *(he puts his arms over his head for the cassock to go on. Chigi lifts the cassock and slips it over the Cardinal’s head as Chigi talks)* Go on, then. Tell me the worst. Now the sash...

CHIGI

The nude man was all tied up, with long winding cloths—and Michelangelo was trying to set him free. *(the Cardinal puts his arms out. Chigi ties his sash)*

CARDINAL

(angrily) Not so tight! You're choking me! *(Chigi loosens the sash)* Now *la cotta!* *(The Cardinal raises his arms again. Chigi places the cotta, a thigh-length white lace vestment, over his head and over the cassock)* Who was the model? Anyone we know?

CHIGI

I don't think so. It was night of course, but from where I stood... he looked rather ... *dark.*

CARDINAL

Dark?

CHIGI

You know... Spanish ... or Jewish... or maybe Muslim...

CARDINAL

(appalled) That's enough! *La mozzetta!*

CHIGI

(confused) Which is—

CARDINAL

(impatiently) The cape, the cape! *(Chigi reaches for a short red cape or mozzetta which goes over the cotta. He places it over the cardinal's head)* What is the matter with Michelangelo? He must be stopped at all costs. We'll have to count on Bastiano to keep him sane--

CHIGI

But Michelangelo is his *hero*—think of the insane *Pieta* they made together!

CARDINAL

Mary of the giant lap—I remember! *(shouting)* *Il zucchetto!* *(Chigi grabs the big hat)* No—the skullcap first, you fool! *(Chigi finds the skullcap and places it on the Cardinal's head)*

CHIGI

Dressing you requires more moves than chess...

CARDINAL

If they put a Muslim Lazarus on their altarpiece, the Pope will have apoplexy. He'd take back the fee. He'd revoke your salt franchise!

CHIGI

(hardening) Then I suggest the Papal guards pay Michelangelo a visit, Your Eminence!

CARDINAL

(trembling) On the contrary! Leo can't know anything about this disaster. Cover it up. And quickly. Can't we pay Bastiano an extra fee to find a new model?

CHIGI

We've spent enough on these rapacious artists! They're totally out of control—you should see what Bastiano's *wife* gets up to when he turns his back! If they can't learn to behave like civilized human beings, they don't deserve our patronage.

CARDINAL

La biretta! (Chigi grabs the hat and places it over the skullcap)

CHIGI

(still furious) The ingratitude!

CARDINAL

The cross! *(Chigi places the pectoral cross around the Cardinal's neck. The dressing is now complete. His costumed presence is quite an astonishing sight. The Cardinal views himself in the mirror with gratification, then turns on Chigi)* Please remind our august competitors—all three of them—that we need two acceptable masterpieces by the new year. *Acceptable!* Or there will be hell to pay. *(raging)* And I'm talking about the *real* Hell! Meaning exile, poverty and humiliation! No more commissions and no financial support from the Church, *ever again!* *(raising his right hand)* In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

CHIGI

(bowing) Amen. *(crossfade back to Bastiano and Beatrice, a few days later)*

BEATRICE

I'll be completely covered, don't worry—not even my breasts will show.

SEBASTIANO

Your breasts are *mine*... no one else should see them...

BEATRICE

Actually, my breasts are *mine*, to be strictly accurate.

SEBASTIANO

Do you fancy him? Is that what this is about?

BEATRICE

Not in the slightest! I find him rather... repellant.

SEBASTIANO

Then why do you want this? You don't even know who you'll be modelling as!

BEATRICE

I want to see what you're competing with!

SEBASTIANO

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

BEATRICE

Raphael knows! You *let* him know! You let Chigi see your Apostles!

SEBASTIANO

They admire my work!

BEATRICE

Where is your pride, Bastiano? You think they showed up the other day for a chat? You should *never* have let them do that!

SEBASTIANO

You should never have suggested I was going to paint you as Esther, Queen of the Jews!

BEATRICE

(reassuring him) I'll be a highly subversive muse. I won't let him touch me, I promise.

SEBASTIANO

(defensively) We don't need his help. *I'm* going to support the baby—you have to believe in me!

BEATRICE

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

SEBASTIANO

You're sure it's a *her*?

BEATRICE

I hope so. I hope she's fierce and funny, just like my nonna, and speaks three languages, and dances barefoot in the streets.

SEBASTIANO

I wish she were here right now.

BEATRICE

Me too. I miss her so much.

SEBASTIANO

I meant the *baby*. I dream about her every night ... I keep wondering what she'll be like! How she'll smell. What will make her laugh. Whether her eyes will be blue... and if so, what kind of blue? I have to line up the right paint!

BEATRICE

Why will you never talk about my nonna?

SEBASTIANO

There are ears all over Rome, Bea.

BEATRICE

Is it so wrong to want to know where you come from?

SEBASTIANO

What else is there to know? She was a dancer, she came to Venice from Spain...

BEATRICE

But *why*? Why did she come? That's what I keep wondering.

SEBASTIANO

Who knows? Lots of Spaniards end up in Venice... it's a nice place!

BEATRICE

When she first came to Venice, she was in hiding. A man came to repair a cupboard and found her inside. He could have arrested her, but instead they got married!

SEBASTIANO

End of story.

BEATRICE

No! It's the beginning. Was she escaping the Inquisition? How did she get out? I need to know.

SEBASTIANO

You *don't*! Whatever she did, it's her problem. You need to forget all of this and calm down.

BEATRICE

Remember what you promised me!

SEBASTIANO

(smiling in spite of himself) You never give up, do you?

BEATRICE

(picking up the menorah) Neither did Esther!

SEBASTIANO

Put that thing away. I don't want to see it anymore!

Michelangelo storms in. He's in a rage.

MICHELANGELO

We've been robbed, Bastiano!

SEBASTIANO

(startled) Michele!

BEATRICE

Good morning.

MICHELANGELO

(plowing ahead) Chigi just told me about Raphael's new renderings for his Apostles—Peter on the mountaintop, in blue, with his hands like so *(he raises his hands in shock)*, James twisting away in red—that cretin has betrayed us! *Again!*

SEBASTIANO

(soothingly) No he hasn't. I showed my Apostles to Chigi the other day—he adored them! He must have described them to Raphael...

MICHELANGELO

(shocked at the news) Are you kidding?

SEBASTIANO

They came by to visit the other night... Raphael said he always learns so much from me.

MICHELANGELO

Bastiano!

SEBASTIANO

What? The Apostles are the Apostles! Peter's always in blue—James always gestures like this *(demonstrating)* -- how different can they be?

MICHELANGELO

(furious) What a nightmare. *(he starts to exit)*

BEATRICE

Don't go! What matters is the Lazarus. Did you bring the new drawing? *(beat)* Show us. Please, Michele. *(Michelangelo hesitates, then produces a new drawing. It is the*

twisted Lazarus, his right arm crossed over his chest, grabbing his shroud. Beatrice gasps)

BEATRICE

Oh! *(the three stare at the drawing, in silence. Sebastiano knows this is the one)* The model... did you find him in the--?

MICHELANGELO

(quickly) I found him on the docks. Being taken off a boat. *(beat)* I brought him into the city. He came up to my rooms. I gave him some food, sat him by the window, tore my bed sheets into strips, and tied him up.

SEBASTIANO

Tied him up? That's awful.

MICHELANGELO

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

BEATRICE

(answering Sebastiano) Maybe that was the only way ...

SEBASTIANO

(nervously, to Michelangelo) Regardless, you'd better be careful! The Papal Police do not appreciate naked men being tied up in public--

MICHELANGELO

I needed to watch the story unfold.

BEATRICE

(staring at drawing, to her husband) It's beautiful. *(to Sebastiano)* Look, my love. *(slowly "reading" the drawing)* Lazarus feels the spark from Christ's pointing finger... but he doesn't move. Not yet. He sits, still partly bound. He twists. He reaches for his left arm-- *(to Michelangelo)* it looks like the binding has been hurting his shoulder... is that right? *(Michelangelo nods. Beatrice is energized... she continues enthusiastically)* Lazarus opens his eyes wide. He stares at Christ in amazement. He asks, is it true? Have you given me a second chance? Should I take it? You can feel the blood starting to move through his body!

SEBASTIANO

(nodding) Yes. His right toe pushes the cloth away from his left knee...

BEATRICE

As if he's remembering the sensation of being alive. But he's scared. He's wondering - is it worth it? Do I dare— *(suddenly, a bell rings in the distance, and Beatrice looks up)* Oh my goodness! I have to go.

SEBASTIANO

You don't *have* to.

BEATRICE

(she caresses his face) It's nearly sunset. *(grabbing her shawl)* I'll be back as soon as I can. With a purse full of coins.

SEBASTIANO

Be careful. Please. *(She kisses her husband gently)*

BEATRICE

Everything I do is for you. *(she remembers the Menorah... goes and picks it up, wrapped in a cloth. As she passes Michelangelo, she whispers)* It's perfect. *(she turns and exits, carrying the menorah with her. Sebastiano stares at the drawing)*

MICHELANGELO

What do you think?

SEBASTIANO

I admire you for keeping at it. Knowing me, I would've just settled for what we had.

MICHELANGELO

(shrugging) You have a family to support.

SEBASTIANO

(humiliated) Maybe I'm just a hack.

MICHELANGELO

We'll need another twenty-five ducats for the paint.

SEBASTIANO

What?

MICHELANGELO

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

SEBASTIANO

I've already asked for more—they refused!

MICHELANGELO

Be bold, Bastiano. There are times when – to get what you want-- you have to be willing to--

SEBASTIANO

To what? Tie up your model with bed sheets?

MICHELANGELO

People who follow others never pass them by.

SEBASTIANO

And that's our goal? To pass people by?

MICHELANGELO

Our goal is to paint the truth.

SEBASTIANO

(stung) What truth? You act like it's *you* bringing Lazarus back to life! But it's not. It's *Jesus*! The rest of us are just trying to capture the moment in paint.

MICHELANGELO

That's what you do best, Bastiano! Believe me. The miracle of Lazarus is an act of love.

A light slowly reveals BEATRICE swathed in sheets. She's modelling for Raphael. But in some magical way, she's in the room with Sebastiano and Michelangelo as well. Her red curls blow in a breeze from the window. Her Menorah is on the floor nearby.

SEBASTIANO

(upset) Don't talk to me about love! I'm the one who should teach *you*! *(beat)* Can you even imagine how Bea transforms my life, every single day, when I see her standing by the window, her hair blowing in the breeze, her beautiful hands reaching towards me?

RAPHAEL

How remarkable you are! Like a vision! Raise your arms!

SEBASTIANO

My paintings are an expression of that love.

MICHELANGELO

I understand that.

SEBASTIANO

Do you? *(beat)* Are you telling me you loved this model?

MICHELANGELO

I love the intimacy between Jesus and Lazarus.

SEBASTIANO

You *refuse* intimacy!

MICHELANGELO

(stung) I find it in my work—

BEATRICE

Who am I supposed to be?

RAPHAEL

Anyone in the story you'd like! *(re: Menorah)* But not Esther. Why did you bring that here?

BEATRICE

Bastiano wants me to bury it.

SEBASTIANO

You bury Tomasso inside sculptures of tortured young men and write poems to an unnamed god! What kind of life does that give you?

BEATRICE

Will you hold onto it till I figure out what to do with it? *(Raphael nods)* Are you going to draw my face? Or just my body?

RAPHAEL

I haven't decided. I don't know what this painting is going to be.

BEATRICE

It's the Transfiguration. It's about a man turning into God.

MICHELANGELO

My art isn't about me—it's about escaping from myself.

RAPHAEL

But how do I visualize that?

BEATRICE

You'd better hurry up. It's a competition!

SEBASTIANO

Why? Why must you escape from yourself?

MICHELANGELO

Because my desires will damn me for all eternity.

RAPHAEL

I'm paralyzed. The story is such a mystery. Show me how to imagine it.

BEATRICE

Me? Why? You're competing against my husband! Besides, what makes you think I know?

RAPHAEL

You're full of secrets...

BEATRICE

No one cares about my secrets. I'm invisible. *(She stops, and then can't resist explaining it to Raphael)* But the Transfiguration is about *change*, don't you see? About waking up and realizing that something new is happening... something that's never happened before! Wait till you see the Lazarus.

MICHELANGELO

Wait till you see the Lazarus. Then tell me you're not proud of what we've created.

RAPHAEL

How do I paint "something entirely new"?

BEATRICE

Just paint me.

RAPHAEL

As what? *(beat)* If you could be anyone in the Transfiguration—who would you be?

BEATRICE

Honestly?

RAPHAEL

(sketching) Yes. Tell me.

BEATRICE

You'll laugh.

RAPHAEL

Is it that outrageous? *(Beatrice takes a breath)*

BEATRICE

With all due humility...

SEBASTIANO

Have some humility!

BEATRICE

I would be Jesus Christ.

RAPHAEL

(looking up) What?

BEATRICE

I could do it. I know I could.

RAPHAEL

Be serious.

BEATRICE

I am. I know what it is to feel things no one believes in—

MICHELANGELO

I try to create images people will *believe* in.

RAPHAEL

Jesus doesn't feel things no one believes in!

BEATRICE

Of course he does! He feels he's God, but the crowd sees him as an ordinary man!

RAPHAEL

That's true...

SEBASTIANO

The truth is, if you make art no one sees, it doesn't matter.

BEATRICE

I'd make a transcendent Jesus. My grandmother taught me to dance. Watch! *(she poses with her arms raised, looking up at the sky. She starts to spin slowly, to dance to her own mental music, arms raised as if she were holding castanets)* Can you hear the castanets? *(something captures Raphael's imagination. He starts to draw)*

MICHELANGELO

No one knows what art will succeed... what art will survive. The value is only in the *making* of it.

RAPHAEL

Keep moving! That's it. Could you bend a little at the hips, so we get a nice twist? Permit me... the fabric must fall like so... *(He re-shapes the folds of cloth across her body, until his hands reach her belly. She pulls away)* What?! *(amazed, he touches her belly again. She looks away)* My goodness! I knew you had secrets! Are you...?

BEATRICE

Why not?

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

BEATRICE
Of course!

RAPHAEL
(with growing astonishment) Imagine!

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

SEBASTIANO
Now that I'm going to be a father-- painting seems so *trivial* by comparison.

RAPHAEL
A baby! How incredible!

MICHELANGELO
Any *peasant* can have a child!

BEATRICE
Are you going to draw the bump?

RAPHAEL
(fascinated) How can I not?

SEBASTIANO
I'm not "any peasant"! I'm your best friend! And you're going to be the godfather!

RAPHAEL
It's about *birth*! How could I not see that? I've been trying to create Christ blossoming with the promise of the future! But I couldn't imagine *how*...

BEATRICE
A pregnant Jesus!

RAPHAEL
Is it blasphemy?

BEATRICE
(wide-eyed) It's a metaphor.

RAPHAEL
The son and the Madonna as one! It could give a whole new meaning to the word "transfiguration"! And no one has done it before!

BEATRICE

They never had the right muse. *(she starts to imagine, he keeps drawing. She fills the pose with her thoughts)* I wonder what Jesus is actually feeling as this is happening? What's in his mind? Does he know he's leaving his family behind forever? His entire heritage? Is he terrified? Exhilarated? Full of self-doubt? Does he have any idea of the scale of what's about to come?

RAPHAEL

You're Jesus... you tell me.

BEATRICE

(imagining) I'm the Son of God. I've been performing miracles in the desert eighteen hours a day—I'm exhausted! I've been sweating like a pig pulling loaves and fishes out of nowhere—I've plucked the devil from the mouth of a sick boy—and now God says I have to slog up a mountain--

RAPHAEL

Wait-- what devil in the mouth of a sick boy? What's that?

BEATRICE

Don't interrupt—I'm telling you the story! I have offered to cure an epileptic child—but only if the boy's father *believes* in me. So I say: *(as Jesus, raising her arms up to heaven)* "Father, open these people's hearts! Show them who I am!" *(to Raphael)* God sends me up a mountain, with all my disciples following behind. I ascend to the very top, and suddenly-- *(she spreads her arms)*—I'm there. High above the world. I step out into the light *(she demonstrates)*--

MICHELANGELO

There is a vast universe out there, Bastiano. A universe full of mystery. That's why God made artists.

BEATRICE

--and I hear a voice rumbling in the air. The voice of God, telling the world: "This is my child! Behold her in all her glory! With her, I am well pleased!"

MICHELANGELO

It is not a failure to try and paint the divine! It's a calling.

RAPHAEL

And a flash of gorgeously painted light illuminates your hair -- *(she shakes out her mane)*

BEATRICE

... and the disciples collapse in amazement, staring at the future, knowing that they've seen God, pregnant with possibilities!

RAPHAEL

About to give birth to the Holy Catholic Church!

SEBASTIANO

Bea is my divine. I sense her with me, even when she's not in the room.

MICHELANGELO

We pray for that elusive moment when a figure comes to life on the canvas...

SEBASTIANO

Yes! Like Venus emerging from the foam!

RAPHAEL

I will make you glow from within—

BEATRICE

I will make your painting explode with light! Like a thousand candles!

SEBASTIANO

She lights up every room she enters...

MICHELANGELO

This is *Lazarus*...

BEATRICE

I'm *Jesus Christ*!

MICHELANGELO

Tearing off the bonds of death and being reborn!

BEATRICE

Transforming the future of mankind!

RAPHAEL

Experiencing the moment when the human becomes divine!

MICHELANGELO

It's the victory of love over death. That's the *miracle*!

SEBASTIANO

I can feel her heartbeat in the room ! It's a miracle.

RAPHAEL

You're a miracle.

MICHELANGELO

It's how we'll be remembered! Lazarus will come bursting out of the frame --

SEBASTIANO

Just in time for the birth of our baby!

RAPHAEL

And everyone who sees it will finally... *believe!*

BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT 2

Four months later. Beatrice at home in a loose-fitting nightgown, writing/reciting a poem. Like a piece of performance art. She's exhilarated by the process.

BEATRICE

"Look! Look up, you blind people!
Dance, angels!
Sing out, Voice of the Father!
Fall to the ground, apostles, and cover your eyes!
Do you know me? I am God! I am finally God! It has *happened*! Me!
I am everywhere!
Transitory! Transcendent! Trans..." *(she stops. Thinks)* Transmuted! Transplanted!
Why do you point but refuse to look?"
(The sound of a baby howling. She looks up)
Bastiano! *(beat)* Sweetheart? Could you get her?
(reading the poem)
"Why do you point but refuse to look?
Don't you *believe*?
I defy logic!
I am the mystery that transfigures!
I am energy that illuminates the universe!
And you, who believe you see it all,
You who drape fabric
Over my naked breasts"—
(she stops, crosses out a word, tries again)
"Over my naked soul,
Be warned! You cannot take my belly
But evade my racing mind!"
(calling out) Bastiano!!
(We hear a screaming newborn baby. Sebastiano enters, carrying Luciana. Beatrice folds the paper quickly and smiles at the baby) Hello sweetheart.

SEBASTIANO

The princess needs you now.

BEATRICE

She eats like a horse—I can't keep up! How about a walk?

SEBASTIANO

It's dawn! And it's pouring. *(rocking the baby, who screams)* Look at those blue eyes, all filled with tears like a Venetian canal! What is it, my angel?

BEATRICE

Maybe she had a bad dream. *(reaching for the baby)* Shall I sing her a song? Tell her a joke? *(pulling open her gown to feed the baby)* Are you honestly hungry again, my little monster?

SEBASTIANO

(sadly) I wish I could make milk. I'd be happy to feed her. *(the baby nurses. It grows quiet. Bastiano stares at her anxiously)* What were you writing? When we came in?

BEATRICE

I'll show you when it's finished!

SEBASTIANO

I don't understand. For nine months, you wandered around strange neighborhoods day and night... and now, you huddle by the window, talk to yourself, and scribble things you won't let me read.

BEATRICE

It's not ready. First I have to hear what it *sounds* like...

SEBASTIANO

But what *is* it?

BEATRICE

I'm not sure. A poem, maybe. Or it could be a play!

SEBASTIANO

A play? Now you're writing *plays*?

BEATRICE

(teasing) It's better than reading Bible stories aloud.

SEBASTIANO

What's it about, this poem that might be a play?

BEATRICE

It's about... becoming God.

SEBASTIANO

(quickly) Don't say that. Don't even think it. You're just a person like the rest of us.

BEATRICE

It was only for a moment. It's an exciting subject!

SEBASTIANO

The idea is blasphemous. You know that. Tear it up. *(Beat. She looks down at the baby. He watches her carefully)* Did Raphael know you were pregnant? That time that he drew you?

BEATRICE

(smiling) He will now. If he ever meets Luciana. *(gurgling to the baby)* Is it delicious?

SEBASTIANO

How did you learn... how to do it?

BEATRICE

I just dangle my breast in her line of vision and off she goes!

SEBASTIANO

No... I meant... what you're writing.

BEATRICE

I make it up as I go along.

SEBASTIANO

You never said you wanted to write poetry! *(beat)* Is it a sonnet?

BEATRICE

I don't think so.

SEBASTIANO

Well, a poem has to have *some* kind of structure!

BEATRICE

(defensively) I know! Give me a chance!

SEBASTIANO

Does it rhyme?

BEATRICE

Not yet. It doesn't do anything yet.

SEBASTIANO

Art is about *form*, Bea! It's not just random colors spilled on a canvas...

BEATRICE

I'm not a total idiot! I'm trying to see if I can find words that capture that *feeling*.

SEBASTIANO

What feeling? *(beat)* Why have you never told me what happened that day? When you posed for him?

BEATRICE

It was nothing!

SEBASTIANO

You're lying.

BEATRICE

He didn't touch me... I promise you! I posed, he paid me, and I came home.

SEBASTIANO

He's competing with me for the biggest commission of my career! How can you say it was nothing?

BEATRICE

He's never going to win, my love—he has no idea what he's doing. It was *me* that changed. Suddenly the world felt totally different. As if everything that had been black and white suddenly went into color.

SEBASTIANO

(bewildered) What?!

BEATRICE

You would have been proud. Raffaello was transfigured—he really was! By *me*! For one moment, I wasn't invisible.

SEBASTIANO

(deeply frustrated) You're *never* invisible!

BEATRICE

(trying to explain) To *myself*. I've always felt as if I were invisible to myself. But in his studio... it was as if... for a moment... I could feel the *divine*. Inside of me. Like a light. *(beat)* And I got six gold coins!

SEBASTIANO

That makes it worse. Get rid of that poem before someone finds it and we're all arrested.

A knock. They're both startled. The door opens and Michelangelo sticks his head through. Beatrice is embarrassed to be seen in her nightgown. She hands Sebastiano the baby and covers herself up.

BEATRICE

My goodness! What brings you here so early?

MICHELANGELO

I'm sorry—

SEBASTIANO

(to Michelangelo) My note said to meet me at the studio this morning—did you not get it?

MICHELANGELO

Yes.

SEBASTIANO

There's no breakfast here, if that's what you were hoping for— unless you'd like a little breast milk...

MICHELANGELO

(deeply embarrassed by this) No no... I just wanted a word with your wife...

SEBASTIANO

With my wife? Why? You want her to pose for a painting? *(angrily)* Forget it—that's never happening again!

BEATRICE

(trying to calm him) Bastiano— *(beat. To Michelangelo)* What is it?

MICHELANGELO

Never mind.

SEBASTIANO

I don't care. Use my wife. Everyone else does. *(he turns to go)*

BEATRICE

(crossing to him anxiously) Please don't be angry. Let me be happy.

SEBASTIANO

I'll take Luciana for a walk.

BEATRICE

It's raining.

SEBASTIANO

Then we'll get wet. *(he exits with the baby. Beatrice watches him with chagrin, then turns to Michelangelo)*

BEATRICE

I'm not dressed. (*he shrugs. Beat. She crosses to Michelangelo*) My husband's angry with me.

MICHELANGELO

I fear he's angry with me too. What've you done?

BEATRICE

I've been trying to write a poem. What have *you* done?

MICHELANGELO

That's what I came to find out.

BEATRICE

I can't make him understand...

MICHELANGELO

Me neither.

BEATRICE

I thought about what you said the other day. Make it a metaphor...

MICHELANGELO

And...?

BEATRICE

I don't know how. How do you make a metaphor?

MICHELANGELO

Give it a name that puts them off the scent. Or disguise your subject in another form...

BEATRICE

Like a sonnet? (*Michelangelo nods*) Tell me the rules.

MICHELANGELO

Fourteen lines. The rhyme scheme goes A,B,B,A, A,B,B,A, and then C,D,E, C,D,E. Unless you do the English version—10 lines with a flexible rhyme scheme ending in a couplet.

BEATRICE

That sounds easier.

MICHELANGELO

What's it about, your poem?

BEATRICE

It's about is imagining what it feels like to be God.

MICHELANGELO

Don't do that. According to the Vatican, there is only one sanctioned understanding of God. Anything else is heresy. They'll call you a witch and burn you at the stake.

BEATRICE

That would make a good painting! Almost as dramatic as Esther...

MICHELANGELO

(looking around) Speaking of Esther... where's the Menorah?

BEATRICE

I hid it. Why? Do you want to paint me?

MICHELANGELO

No. I want to hear your poem.

BEATRICE

(surprised at his interest) My poem? It's nothing. It's not even-- *(beat)* Okay! *(he nods)* No. Shall I try to put it in sonnet form first...? *(she thinks)*

MICHELANGELO

If you like.

BEATRICE

Help me, Michele. Please. I've always wanted to — *(she rises, excited)* Here's the beginning...

"We jump, we fly, our hair floats like a cloud
Lit up with burning candles..." *dah duh dah...*

MICHELANGELO

Lit up with burning candles... *(improvising)* "Hot to touch..."

BEATRICE

(nodding) "Hot to touch!
A thousand people..." *(thinking)*
Well, maybe not a thousand...
"A dozen people full of raw confusion
Gaze heavenwards..." Now something to rhyme with "cloud", right? A,B,B,A. *(finding the rhyme)* ... and voice their fears *aloud*..."

MICHELANGELO

Now you need a rhyme for "confusion" ... like "delusion".

BEATRICE

No, *delusion's* wrong-- this is about a crowd looking up and trying to see God...
(*thinking*) "*Illusion*"?

"A dozen people full of raw confusion
Gaze heavenwards and voice their fears aloud.
But nary one can grasp divine *illusion*..."

MICHELANGELO

What is the image you're reaching for?

BEATRICE

A crowd experiencing one of Jesus' miracles—

MICHELANGELO

Which one?

BEATRICE

The epileptic boy. Matthew 17. When Jesus pulls the devil out of the child's mouth to make the father believe...

MICHELANGELO

Why that?

BEATRICE

It's the story I told Raphael the day I played God!

MICHELANGELO

(*his antennae are instantly out*) What do you mean? His assignment is the Transfiguration!

BEATRICE

I know—but he's looking for action to go underneath his Jesus—

MICHELANGELO

(*instantly enraged*) Action? Raphael doesn't *do* action!

BEATRICE

He doesn't know what he does anymore... he's searching for something new --

MICHELANGELO

That's a lie—don't believe it! He just wants to steal from the rest of us!

BEATRICE

Don't worry—your Lazarus will win hands down!

MICHELANGELO

Raphael is painting a boy having seizures? In his *Transfiguration*?!

BEATRICE

(getting an idea) "Crutch"! That's a good rhyme for "touch".

MICHELANGELO

(paranoid) Is he trying to outdo *me*?

BEATRICE

(testing it out) "Except a boy who throws away his crutch!"

MICHELANGELO

Why can I never work without being *robbed*?

BEATRICE

(smiling) Nearly there! Now I just need a final couplet... about the dawning awareness in the crowd that they have been in the presence of Jesus!

MICHELANGELO

This is why I hate Rome.

BEATRICE

(persevering) I love this! "And standing like a sapling, tall and fine..."

MICHELANGELO

(urgently) Have you seen the painting?

BEATRICE

What words best describe the little boy's moment of *salvation*?

MICHELANGELO

Why are you helping him? Your husband is his *competitor*!

BEATRICE

I know... but he let me be *God*!

MICHELANGELO

You've been conned. Raphael is a viper and a menace--

BEATRICE

Why do you all *always* have knives out for each other? You've got bigger enemies than Raphael...

MICHELANGELO

He's the enemy within. *(beat)* He doesn't deserve you.

BEATRICE

I wanted to do it. I was losing my mind!

MICHELANGELO

You're going to lose more than that —

BEATRICE

(exhilarated) Maybe! But I'll have written a *sonnet*!

MICHELANGELO

(taking her in) And that makes it worth it?

BEATRICE

You would've done exactly the same. You know you would.

Crossfade to Raphael's rooms, where Chigi has just entered. Chigi is eating chocolate.

RAPHAEL

I've finished the Jesus! I thought you should see it! *(Chigi crosses to look at the work in progress)*

CHIGI

(licking his fingers) My goodness! You really did make him float.

RAPHAEL

Like a magical bird, you see? But with clean feet, just for you.

CHIGI

So curvaceous! He looks almost like he's ... dancing.

RAPHAEL

(smiling) Exactly.

CHIGI

Very nice. But what will he be floating *above*?

RAPHAEL

I haven't decided yet... some contrasting action ...

CHIGI

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

RAPHAEL

(nervously) Is the Lazarus completed, then?

CHIGI

It's close! They plan to unveil the painting by Christmas.

RAPHAEL

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

CHIGI

Sebastiano's had his baby. He wants the painting done! I hear Lazarus has quite the physique...

RAPHAEL

Oh yes?

CHIGI

Bastiano says the painting will be so dramatic it will turn atheists into true believers.

RAPHAEL

Good luck with that.

CHIGI

(studying Raphael's painting) I've never seen a Jesus quite like this. There's something almost... *sensual* about him.

RAPHAEL

(smiling) You noticed that?

CHIGI

But isn't he a little... small? I mean, in relation to the size of the canvas--

RAPHAEL

(defensively) What are you talking about? He's hovering over a mountaintop. It's called *perspective*!

CHIGI

Never mind. Put 'Cesca and a few other pretty women down below and call it a day!

RAPHAEL

(a moment of doubt) You don't think my Jesus is dramatic enough?

CHIGI

He's perfect.

RAPHAEL

It all depends on what I put down below...

CHIGI

Make sure my darling is right there in the center, underneath God, where everyone can celebrate her gorgeous ass. That will be drama enough.

RAPHAEL

(preoccupied) The question is... from up in heaven, what does “humanity” actually look like?

CHIGI

(with distaste) Humanity?

RAPHAEL

(angrily) I want Jesus to give birth to something indelible down below... a riot of life!

CHIGI

You’re running out of time, Raffaello! The Pope is waiting. He has no interest in seeing a riot, believe me. *(holding out some chocolates)* By the way, have you ever had ... “chocolate”? It’s the latest thing... straight from the new world! *(he pops a chocolate into his mouth)* I think I love it more than sex.

Sebastiano tiptoes into the room with a sleeping baby in his arms, wet from the rain. Beatrice and Michelangelo are where we left them. She looks up, anxiously.

BEATRICE

Where have you been? *(crossing to him)* Is she okay?

SEBASTIANO

She fell asleep.

BEATRICE

In the rain?

SEBASTIANO

I told her the story of Noah and the flood and next thing you know... *(he smiles down at his sleeping daughter. His equanimity has been somewhat restored)*

BEATRICE

I’ll take her. *(she collects the sleeping infant and kisses her husband)* You’re all wet. Let me get you a dry shirt. *(She exits with the baby. Sebastiano eyes Michelangelo)*

SEBASTIANO

Did you get what you wanted? From my wife?

MICHELANGELO

I was waiting for you. You wanted to speak to me?

SEBASTIANO

I did. *(he hesitates)*

MICHELANGELO

Is it about the painting?

SEBASTIANO

In a sense. *(there's an awkward silence)*

MICHELANGELO

Go ahead.

SEBASTIANO

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

MICHELANGELO

But ...?

SEBASTIANO

He's too big.

MICHELANGELO

Too big?

SEBASTIANO

The figure is bursting out of the frame!

MICHELANGELO

That's right! The frame, like death, cannot contain him.

SEBASTIANO

We have an elegant Christ in the middle of the painting, totally dwarfed by your *enormous* Lazarus! It wasn't clear in the drawings... I mean, in chalk, he looked... *normal*...

MICHELANGELO

Normal?

SEBASTIANO

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

MICHELANGELO

Why not?

SEBASTIANO

Don't you understand? We agreed to this commission! We knew what the rules were! We've already spent the money—

MICHELANGELO

Why is it always money with you?

SEBASTIANO

Because there's never enough! Luciana's baptismal robes alone cost a fortune—I never realized how expensive it was to procreate. *(beat)* We had a plan for this commission. We never said—

MICHELANGELO

What? We never said what?

SEBASTIANO

That you'd turn Lazarus into a veiled *giant*! It disrupts the whole balance of the painting.

MICHELANGELO

You don't think it works?

SEBASTIANO

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

MICHELANGELO

It's *not* to make a point! It's to make a painting! You can't always ask permission, Bastiano. We'll never triumph over Raphael if we give them what they already expect. And he'll always beat us when it comes to grace. Don't you want to win this thing?

SEBASTIANO

More than anything. But we live in complicated times...

MICHELANGELO

Then we should portray the world as we find it! Ask your wife!

SEBASTIANO

Don't talk about my wife!

MICHELANGELO

(he stares at Sebastiano) How can the sight of that man fail to move your heart?

SEBASTIANO

He'd move my heart more if he were smaller.

MICHELANGELO

Why?

SEBASTIANO

And if he looked more like... you know... the other characters in the painting.

MICHELANGELO

But he's *not* like them. That's the point. Isn't the model astonishing? He's *morisco*.

SEBASTIANO

What does that mean?

MICHELANGELO

He's from Morocco. He's an *outsider*. Like Lazarus, who has actually experienced death, and must now return to the land of the living. So I chose to paint Ahmed, a man expelled from Spain for no other reason than his faith—

SEBASTIANO

His faith?

MICHELANGELO

What do you think *moriscos* are?

SEBASTIANO

I have no idea.

MICHELANGELO

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

SEBASTIANO

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

MICHELANGELO

(passionately) A Muslim who was forced from his country ... escaped to Morocco... and was finally taken to Genoa in chains in the bottom of a boat!

SEBASTIANO

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

MICHELANGELO

I thought you would—you're an empathetic man ...

SEBASTIANO

But we're painting this for the *Holy Catholic Church*! It's supposed to celebrate the expulsion of the Turks from France!

MICHELANGELO

I know that.

SEBASTIANO

Then act like it! People are moved when they feel *kinship* with the figures in a painting!

MICHELANGELO

Says who? I'm moved when a painting reveals the opposite—someone alone, *unfamiliar*, struggling to belong--

SEBASTIANO

Of course you are! You get to throw as many grenades as you like because everyone knows you're a genius. I don't have that luxury...

MICHELANGELO

You *must*! Otherwise you're just living in a fantasy world! We can't be slaves to the Vatican.

SEBASTIANO

How else do you suggest we make a living?

MICHELANGELO

Are you really so worried about our devout sponsors?

SEBASTIANO

You should be worried! Wait till they find out who your model was! The Papal Police are everywhere these days. They were angry enough about the Sistine—your Lazarus will push them right over the edge.

MICHELANGELO

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

SEBASTIANO

That's ridiculous! This painting is both of ours. You *knew* you had to fit Lazarus into the existing scheme.

MICHELANGELO

I have to go where the painting takes me.

SEBASTIANO

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

MICHELANGELO

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

SEBASTIANO

I *am* part of history! I have a child now.

MICHELANGELO

And a wife who spent her pregnancy standing outside the gates of the Ghetto, staring at Jewish children. Ask her what *she* thinks of my Lazarus!

SEBASTIANO

(*beat. Frightened*) Who told you Bea went to the Ghetto?

MICHELANGELO

She did. (*beat*) I saw the Menorah. We all saw it!

SEBASTIANO

That's none of your business! We cannot afford to get in trouble, Michele-- the Church is our support and our salvation.

MICHELANGELO

Then let's just give up painting and light incense sticks instead...

SEBASTIANO

(*angry*) You think I'm a coward? You're worse! You've alienated Chigi by refusing his commissions, you made the Sistine a war zone for no reason, and it doesn't matter, because you're the great man!

MICHELANGELO

Stop it.

SEBASTIANO

We've been friends for years, but you're happy to see me destroyed for the sake of a painting. And the awful thing is, you don't even *care*! You wear your selfishness like a badge.

MICHELANGELO

We must aim for something bigger than ourselves. This painting is what viewers need to *understand* about Lazarus.

SEBASTIANO

That he's twice the size of Christ? That he's a Muslim refugee, bursting out of the painting? He's *not*! Read the Bible story! He's just an ordinary guy who died. A grateful man chosen by Jesus to undergo a miracle...

MICHELANGELO

The fact that Jesus *chose* him makes him extraordinary! We must show that--

SEBASTIANO

No! We must give viewers *hope*. The painting should make them believe in salvation! In a happier future! Which is another problem with your Lazarus—you can barely see his face, and what you *can* see looks completely ambivalent!

MICHELANGELO

He's being asked to go where no one has ever gone before--

SEBASTIANO

He's being *saved*! That's what the Church is paying us to depict. (*Beatrice enters. She senses the tension in the room. She's cradling the baby in one arm. With the other, she hands Sebastiano a dry shirt*)

BEATRICE

Here, love. Put this on.

SEBASTIANO

(*taking it*) Thanks. (*Beatrice puts the sleeping baby in the cradle. Sebastiano changes his shirt*)

MICHELANGELO

(*without giving up, to Sebastiano*) My Lazarus may seem out of scale, but he enhances the story of the miracle. I beg you to reconsider.

SEBASTIANO

I beg you to repaint it.

MICHELANGELO

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

BEATRICE

What's happening?

SEBASTIANO

(*to Beatrice*) It's a disaster. He has upset the entire composition of the painting.

BEATRICE

There has to be a solution--

SEBASTIANO

Really? (*angrily*) You're the one who longed for this collaboration. And now look!

BEATRICE

Maybe the conflict will make it a great painting! Art can't always be nice.

SEBASTIANO

You think that's what my work is? "*Nice*"?

BEATRICE

You bring out the best in each other—I *know* you do. You just have to *try*--

There's a knock on the door. Sebastiano yells out.

SEBASTIANO

Go away, whoever you are! *(to Michelangelo)* What else can I try? I have painted the most luminous Christ I know how to paint... but at the moment he's completely eclipsed by--*(another knock. Sebastiano is enraged)* I said go away! *(Raphael enters. He's not himself)*

RAPHAEL

It's me.

BEATRICE

You! *(she's startled)* My goodness. It's the whole School of Athens!

SEBASTIANO

Get out! We're busy!

RAPHAEL

I need help.

MICHELANGELO

You bastard! She's helped you enough—now you want *more*?

RAPHAEL

(undeterred, to Beatrice) I brought you a gift. *(he holds out a capon, already cooked, wrapped in a dish cloth)* A capon. Stuffed with chestnuts. *(beat. They stare at him)*

BEATRICE

Why?

RAPHAEL

I don't know. For dinner.

BEATRICE

How about breakfast? I'm starving.

RAPHAEL

Whatever you'd like. *(he hands her the capon)* I'm sorry it's a little wet.

BEATRICE

Apotheosis only happens once, Rafaello. But thank you for the capon.

RAPHAEL

(struggling) I'm in purgatory, can't you see?

MICHELANGELO

Purgatory is where the action is.

RAPHAEL

Please.

SEBASTIANO

It's enough! Get out of our house, both of you! I need to talk to my wife.

RAPHAEL

(seeing Luciana) Oh my lord! Look! Jesus's baby! *(to Beatrice)* It's a miracle!

SEBASTIANO

(proudly) Her name is Luciana.

RAPHAEL

(entranced, to Sebastiano) How exquisite she is! My congratulations!

SEBASTIANO

(pleased, in spite of himself) Thank you!

RAPHAEL

May I draw her?

SEBASTIANO

Absolutely not!

RAPHAEL

(to Beatrice) You helped me imagine God. Do you remember? So how do I depict what God unleashes when she appears above that crowd?

SEBASTIANO

She?

MICHELANGELO

What crowd? What are you talking about?

BEATRICE

Go home, Rafaello. This is a bad time.

SEBASTIANO

A very bad time! How are we going to survive? Any of us? How will we *eat* this winter, my family and me? *(to Michelangelo)* You're Luciana's godfather—are you going to save her from starvation? *(Raphael starts to draw Sebastiano's distressed face)* Tell me! Any of you! If we lose this commission and alienate the Church, what is the future for us?

BEATRICE

You're not going to lose it—you're going to make something bigger and better than anything you've made before!

SEBASTIANO

Don't be ridiculous. *(enraged, to Raphael)* And what are you doing?

RAPHAEL

I'm drawing *you*! Your wonderful, tormented face! It's just what I was looking for.

SEBASTIANO

Why?

RAPHAEL

(as he quickly sketches) I need a father who loves his child more than anything on earth and is terrified of losing him. *(to Beatrice)* Like the Bible story you told me.

SEBASTIANO

What story?

RAPHAEL

(fanatically, as he draws, to Beatrice) Tell it to us ... while I draw... you do it so beautifully!

SEBASTIANO

(interrupting) How dare you? You think you're a child, waiting for a bedtime tale?

RAPHAEL

(to Sebastiano) I brought you a capon, for God's sake!

SEBASTIANO

We don't need your stinking capon!

BEATRICE

(thinking fast) We do, sweetheart. We have nothing in the house!

RAPHAEL

It's better than a dry crust, eh Bastiano?

BEATRICE

(stung) Have you no grace?

RAPHAEL

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

MICHELANGELO

(to Raphael) You arrogant prick. What do you think you're doing here?

BEATRICE

Begging.

RAPHAEL

Brainstorming!

SEBASTIANO

Bullshitting.

MICHELANGELO

About what?

SEBASTIANO

Capons.

BEATRICE

Apotheosis.

RAPHAEL

Purgatory.

MICHELANGELO

(to Raphael) Just go away. You're not wanted in this house.

SEBASTIANO

Neither are you!

RAPHAEL

I have nowhere else to turn.

MICHELANGELO

(to Sebastiano) Please-- you misinterpreted my words --

SEBASTIANO

No, Michele. I heard you loud and clear.

BEATRICE

(persuasively) Maybe the issue is not the Lazarus, Bastiano! Maybe what the painting's missing is a flash of that that ultramarine you use so beautifully—

SEBASTIANO

It's not a *Madonna*, Bea—

BEATRICE

I'm talking about the Christ figure. His pink robe is so elegant... I know, "pink for the Pope" ... but it's *pale*... it can hardly compete for our attention—

SEBASTIANO

He's *Jesus Christ*-- he shouldn't have to compete!

BEATRICE

Even so... just imagine... what if you went back to Christ's robes, and... *(she takes a breath)* ... what if God were blue? *(Michelangelo's attention is arrested)*

MICHELANGELO

Blue?

BEATRICE

That luminous Venetian blue that only Bastiano knows how to paint! *(to her husband)* The blue that made me fall in love with you all those years ago--

MICHELANGELO

(thinking, then turning to Bastiano) Maybe she's right. Maybe the solution to our problem is not form but *color*. Think about it! *(Michelangelo sits on the floor, with bent knees like the apostle Peter in Raphael's painting. Raphael watches, fascinated. As Michelangelo and Sebastiano argue, Raphael starts drawing the two of them, very unobtrusively)*

SEBASTIANO

I can't think anymore! All I know is that I am a father whose best friend is making it impossible for him to ever support his child again.

MICHELANGELO

(his left arm reaching out) You always make it personal.

SEBASTIANO

It *is* personal!

MICHELANGELO

You're a painter!

SEBASTIANO

You're a human being—act like one for a change! Stop colluding with my wife! *(he sees Raphael sketching)* And stop drawing us—I said no!

RAPHAEL

Don't mind me—keep talking— *(to Michelangelo)* You too! Go on! The louder the better! *(the baby starts to howl)* Look! How amazing! Even Jesus' baby is howling!

SEBASTIANO

(to the baby) Ssshhhh, angel. Don't be frightened. It's just arrogant artists attacking each other. *(He begins to blow bubbles in her direction. Gradually the baby becomes quiet. Raphael stares at the baby, fixated on her mouth)*

RAPHAEL

What are you doing?

BEATRICE

Blowing bubbles. It's part of our artistic practice.

MICHELANGELO

(to Beatrice) Why is he here? Get rid of him!

BEATRICE

(to Raphael) Don't do this--

RAPHAEL

(feverishly) I'll pay you double —I'll do whatever you like—I have to capture this.

SEBASTIANO

You have no idea how a father feels! Can you even imagine what it's like to lean over a cradle and hope your sleeping baby will live to see another day?

RAPHAEL

The cradle image doesn't work-- I need something *vertical!*

SEBASTIANO

Vertical?

RAPHAEL

What is the child doing while Christ transfigures?

BEATRICE

At first he's writhing on the ground. Jesus sees him and says to his father: "I will pull the devil out of your child, but only if you believe in me."

MICHELANGELO

(to Raphael) I thought you were painting the Transfiguration!

SEBASTIANO

Is it the story of the epileptic boy? *(bitterly)* Be careful you don't make the father bigger than Christ! *(to Michelangelo)* Surely, you'd agree it would be insane for Raphael to paint a *giant* father and a tiny Jesus, wouldn't you?

MICHELANGELO

Not if Christ were far away.... on the mountaintop, for example, waiting to be seen. It's called *perspective*!

BEATRICE

It depends upon whose point of view the painting is from.

RAPHAEL

(sketching feverishly) You're right! For once, we all agree.

SEBASTIANO

No, it depends upon whether you *believe*! The tragedy in that Bible story is that everyone ignores Jesus because they're not ready to believe in him.

BEATRICE

(coming close to him) But I believe in you, Bastiano. Do you hear me? More than anything in the world.

RAPHAEL

You are a lucky bastard, Bastiano.

(The room grows quiet. Raphael draws. The baby gurgles. The entire room is focused on the baby, as Raphael draws her, and on Sebastiano's pride at his child. Beatrice watches all of them from across the room)

BEATRICE

So many men, Luciana. In thrall to your creative genius. *(to Michelangelo and Raphael)* Okay, gentlemen. You've caused enough trouble for today. *(she crosses and takes the baby from Sebastiano)*

MICHELANGELO

I'm leaving. *(coming close to Sebastiano)* Bea's blue could be just the solution! And if that's not enough to pull our eye center-- how about a dab of white paint on Christ's forehead, right where the sun hits? To help him glow? That might be all it takes. *(Michelangelo nods to the room, then turns and goes out the front door. Bastiano exits into the other room, thinking. Beatrice sits, drapes a cloth over her shoulder, opens her dress, and begins to nurse. Raphael stops in the doorway, watching her)*

BEATRICE

At last.

RAPHAEL

What?

BEATRICE

Silence. *(beat)* The peace that passeth all understanding ... *(beat)* Get out of here, Raffaello. I'm tired. Go paint what you saw. All that confusion. All that terror.

RAPHAEL

I'm Raphael. I don't do terror...

BEATRICE

You do now.

RAPHAEL

(staring at her) Why are you helping me?

BEATRICE

Because no one should have so much talent and so little compassion.

Beatrice has an idea. Juggling the baby, she crosses to the table, picks up a leather binder and takes out a poem. Grabs a pencil and initials the bottom.

BEATRICE

Here. *(holding out the poem)*

RAPHAEL

What is it?

BEATRICE

Inspiration. From a heretical poet. Maybe it will help you finish your painting...

RAPHAEL

If it does ... I'll leave you a bag of gold. *(taking the poem)* Thank you. What have I ever done for you?

BEATRICE

You let me be God. *(She exits with the baby. Raphael watches her go, then exits)*

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

SEBASTIANO

Please, my friends. Come in! Welcome! What a gift to have you in my studio.

CARDINAL

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

CHIGI

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

SEBASTIANO

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

CHIGI

(looking around) Where's Michelangelo?

SEBASTIANO

(awkwardly) He's sends his regrets. He was... otherwise engaged ...

CHIGI

You don't say.

CARDINAL

Let's see the painting.

SEBASTIANO

Without delay! *(Bastiano pushes open the shutters and unveils the painting. The men face downstage. Staring at the painting. The Cardinal looks up, at the whole—then left, at the Apostles, and finally right, at Lazarus. He comes closer to inspect the figure)*

CARDINAL

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

SEBASTIANO

Yes, Your Eminence.

CARDINAL

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

CHIGI

(with distaste) Very impressive.

CARDINAL

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

SEBASTIANO

Indeed.

CARDINAL

But why is Lazarus so *big*? In comparison to Christ?

SEBASTIANO

(nervously) I thought you might wonder...

CHIGI

(sharply, contemplating the figure) And more to the point, why is he so *dark*?

SEBASTIANO

(quickly) Actually, he's... dirty. He's been in a tomb for three days...

CHIGI

That doesn't look like dirt to me.

SEBASTIANO

No? *(beat. Struggling)* Christ is illuminated in the center, you see? Which makes him clearly the point of focus—

CARDINAL

Right. Look at that fleck of sunlight glowing on his forehead. *(to Bastiano)* The figure is yours, I presume?

SEBASTIANO

Yes, Cardinale. The Christ is mine.

CHIGI

(with distaste) And no doubt the Lazarus is Michelangelo's...

SEBASTIANO

(plowing forward) Christ is robed in pink, as you see. Pink for the Pope.

CARDINAL

And blue for Our Lord! Look at that ultramarine blue shawl. Spectacular, Bastiano. A blue that could save one's soul. I half expected him to be nude...

CHIGI

Christ may be well-dressed but that naked Lazarus is in *front!* Crowding out every other figure in the painting!

SEBASTIANO

Perhaps you could say... his size ... reflects the scale of the miracle.

CARDINAL

Like the force of life breaking free of death, yes... *(staring at the painting)* But Lazarus' head is so small, compared to his torso ... and he's *veiled*... it's difficult to tell what he's thinking...

SEBASTIANO

The choice to come back to life—how can we even imagine it?

CHIGI

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

CARDINAL

(warning) The assignment was not to reveal doubt. It was to honor Narbonne.

SEBASTIANO

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

CARDINAL

Fear? What is there to fear?

SEBASTIANO

Michelangelo thought... perhaps Lazarus didn't ask for a second chance.

CARDINAL

(sharply) Is he doubting the miracle of the Resurrection?

SEBASTIANO

No! We're celebrating the unfathomable mystery of life. *(Silence. The Cardinal is unexpectedly moved. Chigi stares at him, then back at Sebastiano)* You see all the other stories it contains? The three women up above, covering their noses because of the smell of the corpse? Aren't they lifelike? At the center of the painting is Lazarus' sister, Mary, in yellow. *(pointing to the yellow figure kneeling before Christ)* Her face is based on my wife's. And the hands too. And on the left—do you recognize what I've included in the distance? A Roman bridge, symbol of the Pontificate!

CARDINAL

Much appreciated.

SEBASTIANO

I've never painted so many figures in a single painting. Forty, in fact! Do you see? Forty figures, for only five hundred ducats! Perhaps your Excellency would consider—

CHIGI

(interrupting quickly, before the talk devolves to money) Thank you, Bastiano. We appreciate the scope of the work.

CARDINAL

"The unfathomable mystery of life..." Nicely put. (*still fixated on Lazarus*) What do you say, Chigi? That Lazarus is certainly... riveting.

CHIGI

(*under his breath, to the Cardinal*) He's twice the size of Christ and he looks like a Muslim dockworker! What is the Vatican going to say?

SEBASTIANO

Please—I can explain—I'm so grateful for this commission and—

CHIGI

(*ignoring him*) Of course, the nave of Narbonne Cathedral is very shadowy... perhaps no one will notice ... and if you hung Lazarus right over the altar, smoke from the candles might eventually darken the whole painting, and then—

CARDINAL

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

CHIGI

I'm just the banker, Your Eminence. But Michelangelo's arrogance is unforgivable. He should be stopped.

CARDINAL

(*sharply*) These paintings are how we'll be remembered, Chigi. Would you prefer it if the Lazarus were mediocre?

SEBASTIANO

(*carefully*) Your Eminence, Michelangelo and I finished our painting on time, and on budget. I'm honored that it meets with your approval. And it seems to me—

CARDINAL

That you should win? (*beat. He smiles*) You have a point. I'm sure Raphael is waiting to look at this before he decides how to finish his Transfiguration, eh, Bastiano? (*slightly mocking*) Do you think when Raphael sees the Lazarus, he'll decide to paint some giant figure beneath his Jesus, half naked and raising his fist to heaven?

CHIGI

(*reassuring*) Never! Raphael hates sensationalism. His Transfiguration will be charming and harmonious, I guarantee it.

SEBASTIANO

But it could be *months* before he finishes! I beg your Eminence to consider—

CARDINAL

You have created something exceptional, Bastiano. Whether Raphael's *Transfiguration* is astonishing or a grave disappointment remains to be seen. We shall hang your Lazarus in the Vatican while it awaits its rival.

SEBASTIANO

(bowing) Thank you, Your Eminence. I shall live in hope. *(He leads Chigi and the Cardinal off. Back in his studio, Raphael lights a candle and pulls out Beatrice's poem. He begins to read it aloud)*

RAPHAEL

"Look! Look up, you blind people!
Dance, angels!
Sing out, Voice of the Father!
Fall to the ground, apostles, and cover your eyes!
Do you know me? I am God!"
(Raphael looks up. Smiles)
"I am finally God"...

A shutter is opened and we are back in Sebastiano's studio, a week after the unveiling of the Lazarus. Michelangelo is packing some brushes and tools into a bag, preparing to leave.

MICHELANGELO

Why did you pose for him?

BEATRICE

(beat. She studies his face) I wanted to become someone else.

MICHELANGELO

That's impossible.

BEATRICE

Not necessarily.

MICHELANGELO

Did it work, then?

BEATRICE

For a moment. *(beat)* And I got paid. We need to live, Michele.

MICHELANGELO

I know. *(beat)* Have you finished your sonnet?

BEATRICE

Sort of... *(beat)* I'm finding it much harder than I thought. *(Michelangelo smiles. He totally understands that feeling)*

MICHELANGELO

The tragedy of being an artist! Whatever you finally create... it's never even close to what you imagined it could be. *(there's a slightly awkward pause)* Don't give up on it.

BEATRICE

(surprised) Why not?

MICHELANGELO

It's like raising a child, I imagine. You can't abandon it, just because it misbehaves.

BEATRICE

(smiling) Who am I going to talk to when you're gone?

MICHELANGELO

Your husband.

BEATRICE

I try. We don't always understand each other.

MICHELANGELO

I'm sorry my Lazarus made him unhappy.

BEATRICE

If only you could explain to him what you *meant*.

MICHELANGELO

The painting didn't cohere. I see that now.

BEATRICE

Maybe coherence is overrated. *(she smiles)* Anyway, what's more important, the painting or your friend?

MICHELANGELO

Are you making me choose?

BEATRICE

He loves you. We both love you.

MICHELANGELO

I've done nothing to deserve it.

BEATRICE

That's not true.

MICHELANGELO

(struggling to explain) Other people may be able to escape from their own minds, their own hearts, but I find it impossible. I chip away at blocks of stone and hope something emerges... but I myself am trapped, forever, like a moth in amber—no matter how hard my soul tries to fly, it is always bound by my appalling body—by the limitations of my own imagination. What can I do? Everyone's searching for love and hope and transcendence, but me? I have no grace, I will have no salvation, it is my curse to see the world as I see it, to always transform the beauty in front of me into yet another piece of lifeless art the world doesn't need.

BEATRICE

Better that than transforming the reality of the world into lifeless beauty no one needs. *(Michelangelo eyes her gratefully)* Do you have any idea how humiliating it is to be the perpetual Madonna when you know you could behead them all if given half a chance?

MICHELANGELO

What a shame you're not a man.

BEATRICE

You're the only person who has ever spoken to me as if I were.

MICHELANGELO

Why can't you decide to be your own muse?

BEATRICE

I'm not a painter.

MICHELANGELO

You're a poet.

BEATRICE

(smiling) I wanted to be Queen Esther. Avenging her people against the philistines!

MICHELANGELO

Then do it. Stop giving away your imagination as if it were so many grains of salt. Chigi has that franchise anyway.

BEATRICE

I shouldn't cause more trouble...

MICHELANGELO

Trouble is inevitable. And talent is divine. It's your gift from God.

Crossfade back to Raphael in his studio, a charcoal in one hand, the poem in the other. Now he is excited, animated.

RAPHAEL

"...Lit up with burning candles, hot to touch...
A dozen people full of raw confusion
Gaze heavenwards and voice their fears aloud.
But nary one can grasp divine illusion,
Except a boy who throws away his crutch"— *(he stops. Repeats slowly, imagining...)*
"Except a boy who throws away his crutch..."

Which means he's *standing!* It's *vertical!* The boy's not lying on the ground—he's up!
He's standing! He's *cured!* It's the moment of apotheosis! Transfiguration! His little
fist will punch up towards God. *(with huge gratitude, imagining Beatrice is there)*
You saw it all along, didn't you, Beatrice? That boy will anchor the whole painting!
And in return... I will shower you with a purse full of gold!

Crossfade back to Sebastiano's rooms. There is a knock on the door. The Cardinal enters with Chigi. He looks ashen.

CARDINAL

Forgive this early intrusion.

MICHELANGELO

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

BEATRICE

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

SEBASTIANO

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

MICHELANGELO

You look like you've seen a ghost. Take a seat. *(they don't move)*

BEATRICE

(pouring water) Please... have some water. *(she hands them both water. Sebastiano puts Luciana in her cradle)*

MICHELANGELO

Is it Raphael? *(the Cardinal nods. Michelangelo steels himself. Beatrice watches intently)* Ah. He has finished the painting. It is a masterpiece. A work for the ages. Is that it? *(beat. No one moves)* You can tell us. We're grown men. The moment you let

him see our Lazarus, we knew exactly what would transpire. (*Michelangelo stares at Chigi*) Have we lost the fight? Has Raphael triumphed?

CARDINAL

He is dead.

MICHELANGELO

What?

SEBASTIANO

Who?

CARDINAL

Raphael.

SEBASTIANO

No!

BEATRICE

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

SEBASTIANO

Isn't today his birthday?

CHIGI

(*nodding*) His 37th birthday.

MICHELANGELO

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

CARDINAL

A fever. So they say.

MICHELANGELO

(*mystified*) A fever?

CHIGI

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

SEBASTIANO

And that killed him?

CHIGI

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

CARDINAL

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

BEATRICE

And the painting?

CARDINAL

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

SEBASTIANO

Is it finished?

CARDINAL

I'm not sure. There has never been anything quite like it.

BEATRICE

In what way?

CARDINAL

There are already crowds of people lined up in the streets, fighting their way to the front for a chance to pay their respects. *(to Michelangelo)* Did he show it to you before he died?

MICHELANGELO

No.

CARDINAL

(to Sebastiano and Beatrice) And you? *(they shake their heads)* How do you explain it? Raphael's work was always the embodiment of grace—and now it's *grotesque!* What on earth did you people say to him to make that happen?

SEBASTIANO

It wasn't us, Your Eminence—we never discussed it!

CARDINAL

At the top, there's a miniature Jesus, way up above in the clouds. He's *floating!* His robes are blowing around him, his hands are held high—almost as if he were... *dancing.*

BEATRICE

(pleased) Ah!

CARDINAL

The figure looks more like the Mother of God than God the Father! And that's only the beginning ...

CHIGI

He's split the painting in two, like a vision of heaven and hell! The whole bottom half is taken up by a huge chaotic *mob* – like a riot!

CARDINAL

In the center of which is a mad *boy* who is pointing to the sky and blowing something out of his mouth.

BEATRICE

Bubbles. (*Sebastiano, Beatrice and Michelangelo exchange glances*)

CARDINAL

I beg your pardon?

BEATRICE

Perhaps he's blowing bubbles, Your Eminence.

CARDINAL

Bubbles?! (*distraught*) It's a disaster. The competition was *cursed*—I'll bet you goaded him into it! What will I tell the Pope? I promised him an altarpiece celebrating the glory of God, and instead we've got a tiny Christ above mass of gesticulating humanity, full of rage and confusion. From *Raphael!* Master of the sublime...

CHIGI

There *is* a gorgeous woman front and center! He's draped her in pink and blue, and she's twisting towards us to reveal her astonishing buttocks...

CARDINAL

(*sharply*) Chigi! (*staring at Bastiano*) The man who holds up the boy — he has just your eyebrows, Bastiano.

SEBASTIANO

Really.

CARDINAL

What does it *mean*? I can't understand what happened.

CHIGI

Word on the street is that the painting was based on a *poem*, Your Eminence. They found a purse of gold in Rafaello's rooms, apparently intended for the anonymous poet who had inspired him...

SEBASTIANO

(*squeezing Beatrice's hand*) My goodness! Lucky poet! (*quickly*) The story in the painting... it sounds like the miracle of the epileptic boy.

CHIGI

The boy in the painting isn't epileptic. He's standing up, his arm in the air...

BEATRICE

Perhaps because he's been saved.

CARDINAL

Saved?

SEBASTIANO

Matthew 17. The boy is saved when his father believes!

MICHELANGELO

"Help me to overcome my unbelief", the father asks Jesus.

CARDINAL

(thinking) Help me to overcome my unbelief...

MICHELANGELO

Raphael was depicting a crisis of faith.

CARDINAL

Why? It was such a simple assignment!

CHIGI

He wanted to win.

BEATRICE

He wanted to understand how it felt.

CHIGI

And look where it got him! The effort obviously killed him!

BEATRICE

(quietly) People die giving birth all the time.

CHIGI

That is not a helpful thing to say.

CARDINAL

(heartbroken) We must all pray for his immortal soul.

MICHELANGELO

The painting *is* his immortal soul.

SEBASTIANO

Do you really believe that?

MICHELANGELO

People will be looking at that *Transfiguration* when no one even remembers our names.

CHIGI

Who are you to say that, you interloper? He had an entire life ahead of him—and he died for *this*?

SEBASTIANO

(bursting out) Chigi's right! Who knows what paintings will survive in a hundred years? Must every picture try to change the history of art? That can't be the measure of a good life, it *can't*!

MICHELANGELO

It's the only way we get closer to God.

SEBASTIANO

We're *painters*! We decorate a few feet of wall. Angels by the yard, Madonnas by the corridor. Whatever it takes.

BEATRICE

(gently) You don't believe that. I know you don't.

SEBASTIANO

(resolutely) I have to. He's dead. And we're here. With the light of the morning sky and our baby asleep beneath the window. We must go on living!

MICHELANGELO

Or die in the act of creation.

SEBASTIANO

(turning to the Cardinal) Please, Cardinale. What about Raphael's commissions? For the Palace? The Stanze Pontificale? If I could be of help, I would be more than honored. I will give you whatever you want. I know so well how Raphael painted...

MICHELANGELO

What?!

SEBASTIANO

I could pick up right where he left off—

CARDINAL

How good of you to offer, Bastiano. We must give that idea serious thought.

MICHELANGELO

No!

CARDINAL

I beg your pardon?

MICHELANGELO

(to Bastiano, outraged) How can you want to profit off his death?

CHIGI

(to Michelangelo, with disgust) You think you're so superior? You stride through Rome like an unwashed colossus—but someday you too may have to pay for your transgressions.

MICHELANGELO

(crossing to him aggressively) Is that a threat?

CHIGI

It's the truth. You have pushed us beyond our limits.

MICHELANGELO

Isn't that the role of an artist?

CHIGI

To destroy? *(beat)* Go away. You stink. And I'm not well. *(he sits)*

SEBASTIANO

(to Michelangelo) Leave him alone. You've made your point, Michele. My paintings may never make viewers stop in their tracks and reimagine the universe, as yours do. As his *Transfiguration* does. But I don't mind. I will do what I can to honor him, in my own conventional little way.

BEATRICE

The Transfiguration only exists because of you.

MICHELANGELO

(looking at Beatrice) It exists because Raphael found a muse to light up his soul.

CARDINAL

It exists because *I* commissioned it. And Chigi wrote the check.

CHIGI

(drily) I hope you'll remember my generosity if *you* become Pope.

CARDINAL

(threateningly) If I become Pope?

BEATRICE

(to Michelangelo and Sebastiano) We should go and see it.

SEBASTIANO

Now?

MICHELANGELO

I'm leaving for Florence in the morning. *(they're all shocked)*

SEBASTIANO

What?!

CARDINAL

For how long?

MICHELANGELO

Forever, I hope.

CARDINAL

You traitor. You break everything to pieces and then you run back to Florence.

SEBASTIANO

What about Luciana? *(he lifts her out of her cradle)*

MICHELANGELO

Forgive me.

SEBASTIANO

You promised!

MICHELANGELO

(eyeing the Cardinal) It can't be helped.

SEBASTIANO

(insistently) She's your goddaughter.

MICHELANGELO

When I look at the *Transfiguration*, I will celebrate her presence on the canvas...

CHIGI

What are you talking about? There's no baby in that painting.

BEATRICE

Look closely when you view it again, Signore Chigi. You might be surprised.

CARDINAL

Say that again? *(The Cardinal stares at them, trying to understand)*

CHIGI

(wearily) My heart can't take much more surprise.

CARDINAL

Take care, Agostino, lest I lose my banker and my star artists in the same week.

Beatrice takes Sebastiano and Michelangelo's hands in hers.

BEATRICE

We'll go see the painting together. Now, while we can. And then Michele will leave Rome and set up a new life--

SEBASTIANO

And you and me?

BEATRICE

(passionately) We'll light the Menorah! We'll teach our daughter to dance in the streets! And you will make a magnificent painting of me as Queen Esther, all in blue, saving her people from destruction!

CHIGI

(sharply) I told you to stop making trouble.

BEATRICE

(to Chigi) Trouble is inevitable, Signor Chigi. And talent is our gift from God. How can we let it go?

CARDINAL

(staring at her) We must pray for Rafaello's immortal soul! *(they bow their heads)*

(raising his hands) In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"Our father, who art in heaven, forgive Thy son, Rafaello di Santo, taken from us this day, April 6, 1517.

Your power brings us to birth,

Your providence guides our lives,

And by your command, we return to dust.

Those who die still live in your presence,

Their lives change but do not end."

"In company with Christ,

Who died and now lives,

May they rejoice in your kingdom,
Where all tears are wiped away.
Unite us together again in one family...
To sing your praises forever and ever. Amen.”

As they cross themselves, Beatrice steps forward and surveys the room.

BEATRICE

Before you go, gentlemen... may I offer my own prayer? It's a sonnet, actually. In memory of Raphael. In celebration of his *Transfiguration*... *(The men stare at her, wondering what's next. She smiles and begins to recite)*

“The mountaintop is empty, bare and wild,
Except for a woman who is perhaps with child.
She jumps, she flies, her hair floats like a cloud,
Lit up with burning candles, hot to touch!
A dozen people full of raw confusion
Gaze heavenwards and voice their fears aloud.
But nary one can grasp divine illusion,
Except a boy who throws away his crutch!
And standing like a sapling, tall and fine,
He glimpses...

For a moment...

The divine.”

BLACKOUT. END OF PLAY.