

WHAT DID DA VINCI DO in BED?

--a play by Daniel Curzon

CHARACTERS: (8 roles, 7 actors needed)

LEONARDO DA VINCI, forty-eight, sociable, wide-ranging in his talents and interests, including pageants and weaponry, chases each shiny new object, at relative ease with his attraction to boys

SALAI (pronounced "sa-lie"), twenty, his student and boyfriend, cunning, sexy, manipulative, impish, down to earth

CATERINA, sixty-eight, Da Vinci's mother, a warm, loving peasant

CESARE BORGIA, twenty-five, a would-be patron, cruel, cold

ISABELLA d'ESTE, twenty-six, a pushy would-be patroness

BUTCHER, thirty-five, a member of the town council, a spy

GEROLAMO MELFI, thirty, a military man, father of would-be student

FRANCESCO MELFI, thirty, student and care-giver of Leonardo, played by the actor who plays his father in Act I.

SETTINGS: The studios of Leonardo DaVinci in 1500 and 1519, pretty much identical. Filled with several benches and incomplete scientific experiments here and there, with notebooks, sketches, books, even a partly dissected human body. Off to one side is an easel with a canvas on it, turned so that the audience can see only its back.

STYLE: Witty Realism, grounded in the earthy, please no artificial "classical" to anybody here.

ACT I

SCENE 1

(LIGHTS UP on Leonardo with a scalpel in his hand about to dissect what looks like a human arm.)

LEONARDO: Now for the Brachioradiatis! (Cuts into the arm.) Ah!

(Enter Salai.)

(He sees the cadaver arm, is appalled.)

SALAI: Oh, for God's sake, Leonardo, do you still have that thing around?!

LEONARDO: Almost finished!

SALAI: Like Hell you are! Good grief, man, get rid of it. It's beginning to stink!

LEONARDO: It does not stink. You stink. (Looks at the dissected arm.) Besides, it's beautiful. Just look at that Brachoradiatis!

SALAI: It's disgusting. I'm not staying here one more minute if that stays!

LEONARDO: Have you no curiosity about the world, Salai? Where is your soul?

SALAI: Up my ass, I guess.

LEONARDO: Not quite, my boy. But close.

SALAI: You'd better not dissect my ass when I die!

LEONARDO: Of course not. . . . How about when you're alive?

SALAI: I'm going to leave you one day. I swear it!

LEONARDO: Beware of promises you won't keep.

SALAI: You'll be an old man soon; then where will you be without me?

LEONARDO: I have my patron. He'll look after me.

SALAI: Hah! Just like the others: when you don't produce out you went. Out you'll go!

LEONARDO: Here let me sketch you. (Grabs a sketch pad.) Let me make you immortal.

(Begins to sketch Salai.)

SALAI: I can sketch myself. I'm as talented as you are, Leonardo D Vinci!

LEONARDO: You are very talented, my boy. I've always said that. And with twice my ego. That's why you're here.

SALAI: I know why I'm here. And it wasn't for my sketching. Or my big ego.

LEONARDO: You were adorable then.

SALAI: I was ten.

LEONARDO: I didn't touch you until you were fifteen. Correct? And you approached *my* bed.

SALAI: So that's how you remember it?

LEONARDO: You do not?

SALAI: I was cold.

LEONARDO: In Italy?

SALAI: I'm sure the authorities at the time would have been very interested in a much older grown man and his interest in a ten-year-old, whatever the weather, especially with your arrest for sodomy -- make that two arrests. They might be even more interested now, now that you're famous.

LEONARDO: You wouldn't.

SALAI: Wouldn't I? You're about to kick me out of your bed anyway. So why not go out in style?!

LEONARDO: You have been free to leave me and this studio any time you chose to.

SALAI: You'd be inconsolable without me.

LEONARDO: Says you.

SALAI: You'd be dead of grief within a month.

LEONARDO: Probably. I still want you gone.

SALAI: You have to say it three times.

(Enter Caterina, Da Vinci's mother, a warm, loving peasant.)

CATERINA: Darling boy! (She goes to Leonardo and embraces him.) My beauty! My precious! My genius!

LEONARDO: Mama!

(Kisses all around.)

4

LEONARDO: Say hello to Salai, Mama.

CATERINA: Never! Not that manipulative little piece of . . .

SALAI: (not seeing her) Are you seeing your mother's ghost again?

CATERINA: (to her son) Does he sense my presence?

LEONARDO: I'm not sure.

SALAI: I wish you would stop talking to dead people!

LEONARDO: Why? They usually have the most interesting things to say.

SALAI: Tell your mother I don't miss her.

CATERINA: I don't miss him either. What do you see in him? If you have to have an underage boyfriend, you can do better than Salai!

LEONARDO: Mama, he has hidden charms galore.

CATERINA: Stop! I don't want details!

LEONARDO: I wasn't going to give you those details.

CATERINA: Why couldn't you at least have waited until he was of age, say, twelve! Although he never married me, and he exploited a poor, orphaned peasant girl, your dear father was a gentleman and waited until I was all of fourteen before he seduced me.

LEONARDO: Poor mama!

CATERINA: Actually, because of his higher social status, your father lifted me up. Don't ever forget that you were sired by a member of the lower nobility—or close enough!

LEONARDO: (tired) Yes, Mama.

CATERINA: I know you don't believe me, but it's true.

LEONARDO: Mama, perhaps you exaggerate.

CATERINA: Never feel ashamed of your ancestry.

LEONARDO: I don't.

CATERINA: Peasant girls don't get a lot of choices.

SALAI: What is she saying now?

LEONARDO: How handsome you are.

SALAI: I'll bet.

5

LEONARDO: My mother likes you, Salai.

CATERINA: Why do you keep him around? He does almost nothing. And what it does do is always bad.

LEONARDO: I love him, Mama.

SALAI: Yeah, blah, blah.

CATERINA: I loved your father. Ah, Piero! Now there was a love!

SALAI: Your mother was a whore, plain and simple. She saw a rich man and went for him.

CATERINA: What did he say?!

LEONARDO: I didn't hear.

CATERINA: I'm leaving. I will not be around anyone who speaks ill of the dead, especially me.

LEONARDO: Stay. Please.

CATERINA: Why? Is there laundry you want done?

LEONARDO: Mama, how can you say that?!

CATERINA: Because I've been doing your laundry since you were born. That's why.

LEONARDO: Well, you can take a rest now that you are dead.

CATERINA: Where is it? (Searches for the dirty laundry.) Hah! Here it is! (Gathers up dirty laundry.)

LEONARDO: Mama, leave it!

SALAI: Is it the laundry? Oh, lazy Salai will do it, as usual.

CATERINA: I can't get to it until Thursday. I thought I might go haunt a bishopric.

(Leonardo gets up, takes the laundry from his mother.)

LEONARDO: Mama, it's all right. I'm old enough to do my own laundry. (Puts the laundry back where it was.)

CATERINA: You won't do it if I don't.

LEONARDO: Don't stress, Mama. It will kill you one day.

CATERINA: So witty, my child, makes jokes about his dead mother.

6

SALAI: Is she leaving? I pray.

CATERINA: Tell him I hope he croaks before my next visit. Tell him I will haunt him one of these days.

LEONARDO: Mama has to leave now. But she says blessings on you, Salai.

SALAI: She does?

CATERINA: I heard what he said earlier. He called me a whore. Well, he ought to know, as a whore, what he's talking about!

SALAI: I feel bad vibrations in the air.

CATERINA: (Makes claws at Salai.) May you have a special and horrible death!

SALAI: Is she gone yet?

CATERINA: Goodbye, my beauty, my genius! (at the door) Leonardo, have children of your own! Listen to your Mama!

(Exits.)

LEONARDO: You two!

SALAI: Once a peasant, always a peasant.

LEONARDO: Be nice, my boy.

SALAI: (to departed mother) Ciao, Mama! (to Leonardo) Okay, where's my pay? I haven't received this week's.

LEONARDO: Let me take a moment to paint a little. (Goes to the easel, picks up paintbrush, applies one stroke.) You are in this picture, Salai. Are you aware?

SALAI: Yeah, hidden away in a corner?

LEONARDO: You should be grateful, my boy. I can barely stand the sight of a paintbrush anymore.

SALAI: Yeah, yeah. Where's my pay for last week?

LEONARDO: Don't you mean your allowance?

SALAI: I'm too old to get an allowance. I want my pay. Pay!

LEONARDO: You haven't done much this past week, by my calculation.

SALAI: I did more than you did. One stroke on a painting!

LEONARDO: I got involved with another dissection.

SALAI: It's always something with you, Leonardo. If I procrastinate, it's because I've been taught by a *master*! As for my pay, I calculate you owe me five soldi.

LEONARDO: Five? That must be because you are more calculating than I am, Salai.

SALAI: I'll throw in a load of laundry. How's that? I do it better than your mother anyway. (Gets the dirty laundry, smells it.) Are you bathing anymore?

LEONARDO: I don't want to argue with you, my boy.

SALAI: Stop calling me "my boy." I'm a man.

LEONARDO: Put down the laundry. There's no need for you to do it any longer.

SALAI: But I want to do it. It lets me know where I stand in your life. (Sniffs the dirty laundry.) Ugh!

LEONARDO: Stop it.

SALAI: But I crave doing your laundry! Why wouldn't I crave doing the laundry of the great Leonardo Da Vinci?! Why, five hundred years from now, historians will be writing treatises on who did Leonardo Da Vinci's fucking laundry.

LEONARDO: I'll get somebody else to do it. (Grabs the dirty laundry away from Salai.)

SALAI: No, I wouldn't dream of it. (Grabs the laundry back.)

LEONARDO: You're not doing it!

(The two of them have a tug of war over the laundry. Salai wins.)

SALAI: Aha! I win.

LEONARDO: I want to get back to the dissection.

SALAI: Oh, don't let me stop you. Go! Go!

(Leonardo somewhat reluctantly returns to the arm on the bench.)

SALAI: Just let me put this stuff in a basket. I wouldn't want to drop any, would I?

(He finds a basket, puts the laundry in it.)

LEONARDO: Thank you.

SALAI: No *problemo*!

LEONARDO: I bet you don't do it.

SALAI: O ye of little faith.

(Salai finishes loading the laundry. Leonardo works on the dissection. Neither speaks.)

SALAI: (goes to the exit) Well, I guess I'll see you later then.

LEONARDO: (Does not reply.)

SALAI: For dinner?

LEONARDO: (not looking up) Don't bother to come back.

SALAI: What?!

LEONARDO: I mean it. Leave and don't come back. I'll have your pay sent to you.

SALAI: You'll . . . ?

LEONARDO: Goodbye.

SALAI: You don't mean it.

LEONARDO: Goodbye. . . . Goodbye. . . . Goodbye. Be well, my boy. But be gone.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2

(Enter the young and arrogant CESARE BORGIA.)

BORGIA: Don't stand!

(LEONARDO stands and bows.)

LEONARDO: My Lord Borgia, how nice to see you. What are you doing here?

BORGIA: (examining items in the room) It's just a friendly visit. You needn't be worried.

LEONARDO: I'm not. (He is.)

BORGIA: Didn't I hire you once? I don't appreciate it when my staff leaves me.

LEONARDO: (after thinking about it) I'm sure you never hired me.

BORGIA: What about all those great weapons you supposedly know how to make?

LEONARDO: I have created a flying machine. Ahead of its time.

BORGIA: But does it work? For a genius, Leonardo, you fuck up a lot.

LEONARDO: I'm sorry, my lord Borgia. I am but a poor mortal.

BORGIA: Well, I may want to hire you anyway.

LEONARDO: But ah . . .

BORGIA: Since I saw you last, I have had my brother, the heir, put to death.

LEONARDO: When you put your mind to a task, you follow through.

BORGIA: You wouldn't believe how much it eases things. But now I need your help, my dear military genius friend, and I trust you will not disappoint me.

LEONARDO: I have not done much in munitions and weaponry of late, Duke.

BORGIA: I don't care. What can you do for me *now*?

LEONARDO: Of course, my lord. My pleasure.

BORGIA: I don't want you to think I'm threatening you. I want you to do me a favor because you want to.

LEONARDO: It goes without saying, my lord.

BORGIA: Good. We understand each other, then.

LEONARDO: We do. By the way, how's your lovely sister, Lucretia?

BORGIA: Same old, same old. She gets on my nerves sometimes. I may have to have her poisoned. (Laughs.) Before she poisons me! What a gal!

LEONARDO: And the rest of your family? Your father, the Pope?

BORGIA: Still the Pontiff. But I think he's slowing down. He hasn't had a cardinal killed in ages. I think he's beginning to think about the Afterlife. Never a good idea. How about you and your boyfriend?

LEONARDO: We're fine.

BORGIA: I always found him sort of a slimy little prick. Tell him I said hello.

LEONARDO: Oh, I will.

BORGIA: Now about that job.

LEONARDO: My pleasure, I'm sure.

10

BORGIA: Is that an arm you're dissecting?

LEONARDO: I'm afraid it is.

BORGIA: It's beginning to smell. If you need a new one, just let me know. I'm sure I can get you a fresh one. I know people.

LEONARDO: You're too kind.

BORGIA: Just don't ask where it comes from. (Laughs.)

LEONARDO: I get them from the hospital.

BORGIA: Oh, you don't want diseased ones, do you? You don't want to pick up anything.

LEONARDO: I'm very careful not to nick myself.

BORGIA: Is it true that pus is bad for you? I hear different things.

LEONARDO: Let's just say I don't think it's good for you.

BORGIA: I love chatting with you about pus, my friend, but can you build me an underwater bridge? I want to re-take Romagna by spring!

LEONARDO: I pride myself on my variety of skills.

BORGIA: My man, versatility is all well and good. But can you actually make something that works now, not in three hundred years?

LEONARDO: I *am* very busy these days.

BORGIA: Too busy for Cesare Borgia?

LEONARDO: Perhaps I can find the time. I'm not sure.

BORGIA: Of course you can! Wasn't that you who devised the cannonball flung by a catapult, all the better to mow down the enemy?

LEONARDO: It was, my lord. If I may be permitted to say so.

BORGIA: Don't be so modest. I like you. And your paintings aren't bad either.

LEONARDO: I try, sir.

BORGIA: (taking a peek at the painting on the easel) Is this the new one?

LEONARDO: I've been working on it for a while. I'm slow.

BORGIA: Keep at it. I like your stuff. (Takes another peek at the painting.) This one can use a little work.

LEONARDO: You don't like it?

BORGIA: It's pretty. I'm just saying . . .

LEONARDO: I'll look at it anew.

BORGIA: You gotta keep your mind open, that's all. This Renaissance thing could be just a fad, you never know. You know what I'm sayin'?

LEONARDO: I agree with you that life is uncertain. That's why I like to know as much about it as I can.

BORGIA: Hey, I heard that you're now a vegetarian. Is that true?

LEONARDO: Yes, my lord.

BORGIA: You just eat plants?!

LEONARDO: Yes, I do.

BORGIA: I don't get it.

LEONARDO: I doubt that you want to know my reasons.

BORGIA: Sure I do!

LEONARDO: I don't want to kill animals.

BORGIA: Why not? That's what they're for.

LEONARDO: I think a time will come when people will consider killing animals the same as killing men.

BORGIA: Oh, Leonardo, give me a break. You're kidding. You're killing me! You can tell me a wild boar was meant to live. How boring life would be without killing things. Death is as beautiful as life, maybe more so. And I mean of men. Do you disagree?

LEONARDO: I wouldn't dream of attempting to change your mind, my lord Borgia.

BORGIA: Why do I get the impression that you find me a ruffian, a brute? Hmm?

LEONARDO: I suppose it's different tastes for . . . different tastes.

BORGIA: So soft-hearted, my friend. And yet cannonballs from a catapult? I'm sure that can't feel good on an army, can it? And what's this about a machine gun you've invented? True?

LEONARDO: You are quite astute to note my inconsistency.

BORGIA: They say I am a monster who will do and say anything to get my way.

LEONARDO: I'm certain the rumors are untrue.

BORGIA: The rumors are entirely true. History will remember me as a madman. Perhaps syphilitic. But you know what I say? Fuck history! I won't be there. So why should I care? Did you hear me rhyme, Leonardo. God, I'm good!

LEONARDO: Perhaps you should devote all your time to poetry, my lord Borgia.

BORGIA: Perhaps I should. But I'm multi-talented in my own way, my friend. And I would not rob the world of my many skills for just one. Just like you. Surely you agree?

LEONARDO: Surely I do.

BORGIA: So we are in agreement then? You will come and work for me one day – and soon. I will tap your less-sensitive side.

LEONARDO: Just as soon as I complete that painting on that easel. (Points.)

BORGIA: It's a deal, my friend!

LEONARDO: All in good time.

BORGIA: Oh, before that, my genius friend, much before that. I will leave you now. But I will be in touch, trust me. (He wipes his hand along one of the benches.) Oh, I think you have ants, my friend. (Exits.)

LEONARDO: (after making sure Borgia is gone) Damn! Damn me. Damn him!

BLACKOUT

SCENE THREE

(Enter the young, would-be patroness, Isabella d'Este.)

ISABELLA: You who! Leonardo! Where are you? (No response.) Are you out? (No response.) Salai, you scamp, are you hiding from me? Well, it won't work. (Goes around checking on hiding places in the studio.) Hmm. Maybe they really are out? (She goes over to look at the painting on the easel.) Ah, yes, lovely. I want one of me just like it.

(Enter Leonardo.)

LEONARDO: Oh, it's you. You startled me, Marchessa.

ISABELLA: Did I? Well, it's not everybody who gets startled by a marchessa! I suppose you know why I'm here.

LEONARDO: I'm sure you will inform me.

ISABELLA: I thought you were hiding from me.

LEONARDO: Just getting some carrots for later.

ISABELLA: Why doesn't Salai get them? Too lazy?!

LEONARDO: I'm afraid Salai no longer lives or works here, madam.

ISABELLA: Oh, "madam" makes me sound so old. "Marchessa" is fine.

LEONARDO: As you wish.

ISABELLA: So what's that scamp Salai been up to this time? Drunk at the pope's wedding? Lying to the priest in the confessional?

LEONARDO: We just no longer see eye to eye.

ISABELLA: Well, whatever you do, don't take him back. You always forgive him. He's not good for you, Da Vinci. He's just not.

LEONARDO: Thank you for your advice, Marchessa.

ISABELLA: I always thought Salai was using you. I wanted to warn you when you were doing that chalk portrait of me, but I held back. Did you know that?

LEONARDO: I find it hard to believe you holding back on anything, milady.

ISABELLA: I don't know what you see in him.

LEONARDO: I guess I must agree with you.

ISABELLA: We're a lot alike, Da Vinci, you and I. You do what you like. I do what I like. We're both artists in our own way. I just wish I could draw as well as you.

LEONARDO: It's a gift, my lady. I cannot claim it a virtue.

ISABELLA: I just loved that chalk drawing that you did of me a year ago in Mantua. Did I tell you?

LEONARDO: Many times. Thank you for the compliments.

ISABELLA: But one can only compliment so much, *n'est pas*?

LEONARDO: It certainly made me feel wanted and needed.

ISABELLA: Oh, you've finished it then?! Where is it? Can I see it? (Searches for it.)

14

LEONARDO: I have not finished it, my lady.

ISABELLA: (sharply) Why not? I offered to pay for it!

LEONARDO: I'm aware of that.

ISABELLA: What's wrong then? Did I not offer enough? Do you want more?

LEONARDO: Your offer was most generous, my lady. But I . . .

ISABELLA: But what? Am I not a worthy subject? I have been called the most beautiful woman in Italy.

LEONARDO: You are indeed beautiful, Marchessa.

ISABELLA: Then you'd better hurry before I begin to fade. I've heard it happens to the best of us.

LEONARDO: I have been preoccupied, I'm sorry to say.

ISABELLA: You don't have to make me totally glamorous. Just a little glamorous. If you ask me, Leonardo Da Vinci, you spend entirely too much time drawing ugly old men.

LEONARDO: They don't get drawn that much, my lady. I try to be catholic in my tastes. That's with a small "c" on "catholic."

ISABELLA: Don't get too small "c," Da Vinci, or the pope might hear about it.

LEONARDO: You wouldn't?

ISABELLA: Oh, wouldn't I?

LEONARDO: I'm sure that you know people.

ISABELLA: I kid you. I kid you. Look at me – I'm kidding the great Leonardo Da Vinci, the simple little Marchessa of Mantua! What about other poses? Do you fancy this one? (Strikes a pensive pose.) Or how about this one? (Strikes a grand pose.)

LEONARDO: I am flattered that you have sought me out. And such a versatile subject.

ISABELLA: What's this I hear about you already at work on some Mona Somebody, some mere merchant's wife?! Tell me it's not true!

LEONARDO: It may be true, my lady.

ISABELLA: What?! Merchants' wives are never that good for important paintings!

LEONARDO: I'll probably never finish it. There's always a detail here or a detail there left to be perfected. And of course I must also start the painting.

ISABELLA: You aren't actually reluctant to paint me by any chance?

LEONARDO: How can you think such a thing, milady?

ISABELLA: Oh, I suppose great art can't be churned out by the ton, but, really, Da Vinci, would it kill you to finish mine? If you don't do it, I may ask that Michelangelo instead!

LEONARDO: I think he's better at males. Unless you want to be drawn with huge muscles.

ISABELLA: Do I spy some rivalry there? Hmm?

LEONARDO: Perhaps a trifle. I find Michelangelo to be sort of unpleasant. Maybe it's just me.

ISABELLA: No, you're right. Michelangelo is a dick. Pardon my English. Yes, I want you to do my portrait, Da Vinci. What can I do to stimulate you to at least work on it?

LEONARDO: Not much.

ISABELLA: That wasn't very nice of you. Now I'm hurt.

LEONARDO; I'm sorry, milady.

ISABELLA: Sorry enough to finish my portrait?

LEONARDO: I think you may be trying to manipulate me, my dear Marchessa.

ISABELLA: *Moi?*

LEONARDO: *Tu*. Pardon me if that's too intimate.

ISABELLA: It is. . . . Yet I forgive you, Da Vinci! You're just too precious to say no to. Or to have smothered in a cask of my favorite Bordeaux.

LEONARDO: I'm most grateful, my lady.

ISABELLA: You should be. Do you drink?

LEONARDO: Not that much, Marchessa. Not that much.

ISABELLA: You'd love my wines. You could paint drunk! Have you ever painted drunk?

LEONARDO: Are we clear now on where we stand on the chalk drawing of you I did?

ISABELLA: Are you trying to get rid of me?

LEONARDO: I'm sure your time is as valuable as mine, my lady.

ISABELLA: Why you, artistic little shit, you are trying to get me out the door. After I came all the way here from Mantua!

LEONARDO: Perhaps next time you could send a message on ahead so that our times will match.

ISABELLA: Just who the fuck do you think you're talking to, some nouveau rich bitch? I'll have you know that I can trace my ancestry back to the plague of 1630! What are you – some illegitimate offspring of an orphaned peasant girl and a notary public! And you give *me* attitude?!

LEONARDO: I'm not trying to give you attitude, Marchessa. Stay as long as you like.

ISABELLA: You bet I'll stay as long as I like, bastard boy. Don't get all artsy-fartsy with your betters, I'll tell you that.

LEONARDO: I wouldn't dream of it.

ISABELLA: I remember the good old days, when somebody like me didn't have to beg for a goddamned picture. They ordered one and, by God, it was done!

LEONARDO: Times move ahead, I guess.

ISABELLA: Now I'm trying to be nice about this, but you're making it difficult. I want that portrait finished. Now I can sit for it today and tomorrow, or you can do it from memory. But I want that son of a bitch by a week from Sunday! You got it? Otherwise, you may get a visit from some of the nastier Swiss Guard who work for the pope. Believe me, I know some people who know some people. And it won't be pretty. Just make *me* pretty! Don't think you can get back at me by making me look bad in the finished portrait. Do that and you're dead meat, Da Vinci. Do I make myself perfectly clear?!

(She leaves in a huff.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE FOUR

(Lights up.)

(Leonardo is preparing carrots for his dinner.)

LEONARDO: (to himself, singing) Carrots! Lovely carrots! There is nothing better than a carrot! Tra la! Tra la!

(There is a knock at the door.)

LEONARDO: Oh, no! Well, at least they knocked.

(Goes offstage, returns with the Butcher in a blood-stained apron.)

BUTCHER: I just happened to be passing by your home on my way to my shop and I thought, What has happened to Mr. Da Vinci?! I never see him anymore. Perhaps he is ill. I must check on him.

LEONARDO: You are too kind, Butcher Luigi.

BUTCHER: I try!

LEONARDO: I am fine. I was just preparing some carrots for dinner.

BUTCHER: Not just carrots, I hope. What about carrots and pig?

LEONARDO: I have changed my diet of late.

BUTCHER: I thought as much. What about carrots and squid? I have some splendid squid in my cart just outside your door. Shall I get some for you? Very fresh. I'd better hurry or they'll jump out of the cart and scamper away. (Starts toward entrance.)

LEONARDO: No, thank you, neighbor. I have become a vegetarian.

BUTCHER: What is that? Some kind of heretic?

LEONARDO: I believe the Church permits non-meat eating, even encourages it on Fridays.

BUTCHER: You are an expert on Church dogma then?

LEONARDO: I would not go that far.

BUTCHER: That's all well and good for Fridays, but a man needs meat on the other days of the week.

LEONARDO: Actually, I've never felt better.

BUTCHER: But your bones, sir, your bones! To say nothing of your . . . (Indicates a big erection with his whole arm.)

LEONARDO: Trust me, I have all of the . . . (Makes the same gesture.) I need.

BUTCHER: Indeed, sir? How fortunate you are. Too many, I've heard, lose their . . . (Makes the gestures again.) after a certain age. Around thirty, I think. You're more than thirty, are you not?

LEONARDO: I am more than thirty, I confess. And yet in tip-top shape. (Makes the erection gesture again.) Now would I lie about something like that?

BUTCHER: Your wife must be very pleased. Is she not?

LEONARDO: I'm sure you know that I am unmarried and have never been married.

18

BUTCHER: I had forgotten. I don't keep track of who's married and who's not. I just care about the culinary habits of my neighbors. The carrot eaters and the like.

LEONARDO: Are there others besides me?

BUTCHER: There are rumors.

LEONARDO: Oh? Anybody I'd know?

BUTCHER: There are some who are said to be doubters.

LEONARDO: Doubters?

BUTCHER; That there was a Virgin Birth, for one thing.

LEONARDO: (pretending to be aghast) No!

BUTCHER: Others even doubt the Great Chain of Being.

LEONARDO: Oh, no. Society might topple.

BUTCHER: Exactly. No prince could sleep easily if that notion got around.

LEONARDO: And they are sleeping so soundly now.

BUTCHER: Something in your tone makes you sound less than convincing, Mr. Da Vinci. And then there are rumors about those who violate other norms, in ways almost unspeakable to mention.

LEONARDO: Well, don't feel obliged to speak of them then.

BUTCHER: Where is your friend, Salai? Napping? (Looks around.)

LEONARDO: He's visiting some relatives for a few days.

BUTCHER: Quite a fellow, that one.

LEONARDO: Yes, quite a handful.

BUTCHER: You've had a handful?

LEONARDO: It's merely a figure of speech.

BUTCHER: Salai has lived with you for some time, if memory serves. From when he was but a boy.

LEONARDO: He's twenty now.

BUTCHER: Is he? That means he must have been about ten years old when he moved in with you. Could that be right?

LEONARDO: He showed great potential, as an artist.

BUTCHER: I'll bet.

LEONARDO: Has Salai been to see you? You're on the town council, if memory serves.

BUTCHER: No, as I said, I just happened to be passing your home and I wondered about you and what you might be up to.

LEONARDO: Well, how thoughtful of you. Thinking of me when you have all those ducks and geese and squid to dispatch, day in, day out.

BUTCHER: We all have an obligation to keep watch on our neighbors, lest they fall by the wayside in one way or another. There are so many waysides.

LEONARDO: It seems to me that live and let live should be the order of the day.

BUTCHER: I'll bet you do, Mr. Da Vinci, I'll bet you do.

LEONARDO: Are you trying to tell me something?

BUTCHER: What would that be?

LEONARDO: Perhaps I'm hyper-sensitive.

BUTCHER: You artists!

LEONARDO: Would you like stay to dinner? I'm serving carrots.

BUTCHER: Oh, no thank you. I don't care for carrots.

LEONARDO: They don't agree with you?

BUTCHER: If they don't agree with me, I just slap them upside the head, and they lie right back on my plate. Nobody likes a sassy carrot.

LEONARDO: Nobody likes a sassy carrot? Did you make that up yourself? It's very funny.

BUTCHER: Now you wouldn't be trying to flatter me, would you, Mr. Da Vinci?

LEONARDO: It sounds like something Aristophanes might write.

BUTCHER: I don't know who that is, but now I'm sure you're trying to flatter me.

LEONARDO: Aristophanes was a Greek comic playwright.

BUTCHER: Oh, the Greeks. I've heard of them. They were a little kinky, weren't they?

LEONARDO: I don't know that much about them, to tell the truth. I try to rely on observation for my information, not the handed-down.

BUTCHER: Very wise of you. But then again, the wisdom of the ancients. No?

LEONARDO: It's possible they had certain practices that might not be approved of in modern-day Italy.

BUTCHER: Such as?

LEONARDO: I can only guess.

BUTCHER: Can you? . . . I can't. Enlighten me.

LEONARDO: From what I know of different cultures, there is a great diversity of what constitutes good or bad. The age for marriage, for instance.

BUTCHER: You don't say.

LEONARDO: Of course the Church undoubtedly knows what's best for people.

BUTCHER: Undoubtedly.

LEONARDO: (correcting him) Undoubtedly.

BUTCHER: You say "undoubtedly." I say "undoubtedly." Different strokes for different folks, no? People hate it when you correct their pronunciation, have you noticed?

LEONARDO: Well, I'd better be getting back to work.

BUTCHER: Of course you must. I understand that you are a great man.

LEONARDO: Only time will tell.

BUTCHER; By any chance are you taking on new pupils?

LEONARDO: Oh? Do you draw or paint?

BUTCHER: It's not for myself. I have no talent – except slaughtering things. I like to think they don't suffer as much with me. (Laughs.) Or maybe more!

LEONARDO: I'm not taking on any new students at this time, I'm afraid.

BUTCHER: Oh, I heard otherwise. The name Francesco Melzi came up when we were discussing you at the last town meeting.

LEONARDO: You were discussing me at a town meeting?

BUTCHER: Nothing but the highest praise, I assure you. Someone said that the elder Melfi was looking for a place for his talented son, Francesco, who is nine. Naturally your name came up.

LEONARDO: How could I not be flattered?

BUTCHER: I thought you might be. By all accounts, this Francesco is a delightful boy, intelligent, respectful, blond. Quite adorable. Is that the word?

LEONARDO: If I take a student, I always prioritize artistic talent first.

BUTCHER: And second?

LEONARDO: I have heard nothing of such a pupil, so it is not important what I think.

BUTCHER: So I should tell the town council that you aren't interested in this Melfi lad then?

LEONARDO: I had no idea I was of such interest to the town fathers.

BUTCHER: Trust me, Mr. Da Vinci, you are much marveled at. Even more than the Medici family.

LEONARDO: I am surprised to learn that. I take such pains to keep a low profile.

BUTCHER: I know! But we find your every movement fascinating, absolutely fascinating.

LEONARDO: Perhaps I'll do a fresco or some such for the town one of these days. How does that sound? Another "Last Supper," only on a better surface this time.

BUTCHER: You made a mistake?

LEONARDO: I try to experiment with oils and surfaces. Unfortunately, a Last Supper I did is already peeling.

BUTCHER: Best to stick to the tried and true, Mr. Da Vinci. Safer that way.

LEONARDO: I'll let you and the town council select everything.

BUTCHER: I'm sure we can't afford you.

LEONARDO: Maybe we can work something out.

BUTCHER: I'll be sure to mention it to the council when next we meet.

LEONARDO: Do that, won't you? Now if you'll excuse me – my carrots await!

BUTCHER: Good day, Mr. Da Vinci. I'm glad to find you well.

LEONARDO: And to you too, Butcher Luigi. Thank you for your concern.

BUTCHER: Do you mind if we pray together before I leave?

LEONARDO: Pray together?

BUTCHER: Do you object?

LEONARDO: Of course not.

BUTCHER: There are some residents who claim that you are not a believer in Holy Mother Church. I can tell them that we shared a prayer.

LEONARDO: I suppose I had better wear my piety on my sleeve more openly, hadn't I?

BUTCHER: It doesn't hurt. People can be narrow.

LEONARDO: Go ahead then. You start. (He folds his hands.)

BUTCHER: Our Father, who art in Heaven

LEONARDO: Hallowed be thy name.

BOTH: Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. . . .

BLACKOUT

SCENE FIVE

(Later that day.)

(Enter Leonardo with a sketchbook. He scribbles something in it.)

LEONARDO: (looking around, puts the sketchbook down) God, I'm tired. I wish I had a television. Maybe I ought to invent that.

(There is a knock at the door.)

LEONARDO: It's unlocked.

(Enter the brusque father of Francesco Melfi.)

MELFI: Leonardo Da Vinci, I presume?

LEONARDO: (suspicious) Yes?

MELFI: I am Geromalo Melfi. Perhaps you have heard of me and my illustrious family, Mr. Da Vinci?

LEONARDO: Of course! How could I not have! Please call me Leonardo.

MELFI: Thank you.

LEONARDO: Can I offer you some refreshment? Goat's milk? Or -- ?

MELFI: I'm fine. I just attended a banquet. And I don't wish to trouble you.

LEONARDO: It's no trouble. (Makes as if to get some food.)

MELFI: Let me not beat about the bush . . . Leonardo. I have come here on a very important mission on behalf of my son, Francesco.

LEONARDO: Yes, I've heard of him. I mean . . .

MELFI: He's just nine but very precocious. He wants to be a major artist – it's this Renaissance thing, I suppose. I have told him there is enough to do just running an estate like ours. But he simply won't stop going on and on about gesso and perspective, and God knows what all.

LEONARDO: He sounds charming.

MELFI: And he wants to study with you.

LEONARDO: Does he?

MELFI: I have brought some of his work to show you. I think he's quite good, but then I could just be a doting father. Do you mind telling me what you think?

LEONARDO: I don't mind looking at your son's work, sir, but I – I . . . I'm not really taking on new pupils any longer. I must tell you that.

MELFI: So I'm told. And I'm resigned to that, if need be. Then I thought how can a personal visit from Geromalo Melfi hurt?! Right? So here are my beloved Francesco's sketches. Remember, he was but eight when he did them. (Displays some sketches to Leonardo.)

LEONARDO: (examining them) Not bad.

MELFI: Not bad? Coming from you, sir, that's indeed high praise.

LEONARDO: The more I examine them, the better they seem. His shading is quite adept.

MELFI: I thought you might appreciate that. I don't mind saying that you're very talented, Leonardo Da Vinci. And it's said an excellent tutor to boot.

LEONARDO: Where did you hear that?

MELFI: Several persons were yelping it on various street corners.

LEONARDO: Who wouldn't relie on tha1?! I am flattered and your son is extremely worthy and talented; however, I really cannot take on any more work at this time. I'm slowing down a bit. I'm afraid it's age.

MELFI: I will pay you – handsomely. And you won't have to pay Francesco anything. Naturally I'll cover any oils and gouache and such stuff as he may need. I told him he can pay me back when he grows up and does a mural of St. Valerian, our patron saint, on a wall somewhere in our castle.

LEONARDO: I'm sure he will do you proud, sir. But I must decline.

MELFI: Really, decline?

LEONARDO: I pray that you will not be angry with me.

MELFI: Angry? Of course not. Now I had hoped it would not come to this, but I see that I have no choice.

LEONARDO: I hope you don't mean the rack. I find that I tend to paint less well with cracked ribs.

MELFI: I hope you don't mistake me for some barbarian from the Dreary Ages. I am not!

LEONARDO: I'm sure you are not.

MELFI: I have only one wife, two mistresses, a catamite on festive occasions, and I'm planning to free my serfs in a year or two. Obviously, I'm a liberal.

LEONARDO: I can only applaud.

MELFI: Are you certain that you cannot oblige me by letting me son study with you?

LEONARDO: I cannot, sir. I'm sorry.

MELFI: Well then, you really leave me no choice. (Takes out another sketch, doesn't show it.)

LEONARDO: What is that? It isn't of me, is it, doing something society doesn't approve of? There are some things nobody should depict.

MELFI: No, it's a drawing of my son, done last month. Inferior workmanship, but quite a good likeness, wouldn't you say? (Shows the sketch to Leonardo. The audience can't see it.)

LEONARDO: I've never seen the boy. I couldn't say.

MELFI: But he's attractive, no?

LEONARDO: I would not presume to judge.

MELFI: He has those ringlets in the hair that you seem to like, to judge from your paintings.

LEONARDO: Do I? I hadn't noticed.

MELFI: And he's not flighty at all, very composed and mature, for a boy of nine.

LEONARDO: Always a plus.

MELFI: (embarrassed) Forgive me if I appear to be over-endorsing my son. He wants so much to be a star in the art world. And unlike many fathers, I want what he wants, not what I want.

LEONARDO: I have several students already, some better than others. They can be a lot of work in themselves. And accidents can happen in the studio – bad gesso and such.

MELFI: Believe me, I did research on you, Mr. Da Vinci, I would never let anything bad happen to my Francesco.

LEONARDO: Well, perhaps he can come later, several years from now.

MELFI: Now there's an opening, I suppose.

LEONARDO: I was just being polite.

MELFI: Do you mind if I ask you some intimate questions?

LEONARDO: Why don't we wait on those? I have discovered that –

MELFI: (pressing on) Let's get them out of the way now. Perhaps then there will be no further need for discussion. I am a man of the world, Mr. Da Vinci. A military man. Few things shock me.

LEONARDO: Let me ask you a question first, sir. Do you intend to have me relocate my studio to Milan so that your son will be close to his home? Or do you mean to send him here?

MELFI: I would prefer that you come to us.

LEONARDO: I see. So far away?

MELFI: With luxurious accommodations, a vibrant intellectual environment. And show people!

LEONARDO: So I've heard.

MELFI: Now about those intimate questions.

LEONARDO: If you must.

MELFI: Excuse me if I am presuming things about you on unfounded rumors, but I gather that you are sexually attracted to boys. You needn't say anything. I am sure this can't be easy for you, but I do have to know.

LEONARDO: Sir.

MELFI: What exactly do you do with boys and does it injure them, either temporarily or permanently?

LEONARDO: Sir!

MELFI: Of course I would never put Francesco in jeopardy, but I've heard that pedophiles like yourself at times merely like to engage in sucking and rubbing and eschew the more invasive activities of the bedchamber. Can you assure me that you would not subject my son to anything orally or anally painful?

LEONARDO: My lord Melfi, you take my breath away.

MELFI: I don't know why. I just want it all on the table so that there are no misunderstandings.

LEONARDO: But I thought I had made it clear that I'm not taking on any new students now and probably never will again.

MELFI: Yet if you did?

LEONARDO: I'm not going to.

MELFI: Is it possible that you prefer your students to penetrate your . . . bottom, rather than the other way around? I have heard of this.

LEONARDO: You are as thorough in your research in your way as I am in mine.

MELFI: Again excuse me, if I am coarse. But I don't know much about these practices, except for my festive catamite, who isn't all he or she is cracked up to be.

LEONARDO: I appreciate your effort to be well informed, but I am rather reticent about certain areas of life, anyone's life.

MELFI: But surely cloudiness about one's sexual preferences is not helpful in this case, is it?

LEONARDO: Count Melfi, how can I make it clearer to you that I am not going to accept your son as my pupil?

MELFI: So you *would* hurt my boy then?

LEONARDO: That's not what I'm saying or hinting or anything else!

MELFI: You wouldn't be interested in a slightly used catamite, would you?

LEONARDO: It was marvelous meeting you, sir.

MELFI: So where does that leave us?

LEONARDO: I'm sure I don't know.

MELFI: I have to hand it to you, Mr. Da Vinci. You are as mysterious as advertised.

LEONARDO: And you are as unmysterious.

MELFI: Well, shall we leave it undecided then? Although I hate that!

LEONARDO: Perhaps I can put my mind to it and come up with a list of sexual practices that would meet with your approval?

MELFI: Could you? That would be most helpful.

LEONARDO: I'll work on it as soon as you leave.

MELFI: Splendid! I am sure that we can work something out. I'll have a word with Francesco and see what his sexual appetites might be.

LEONARDO: Knock yourself out.

MELFI: Of course it goes without saying that my son will have children, one way or another, since the Melfis must certainly go on.

LEONARDO: (toasting with an empty hand) To the Melfis!

MELFI: (toasting back, also with an empty hand) The Melfis!

BLACKOUT

SCENE SIX

(Enter Salai to empty studio.)

SALAI: Honey, I'm home!

(No response.)

SALAI: Leonardo?

(No response.)

SALAI: Don't be like that.

(No response.)

SALAI: I know you're here. I smell carrots.

28

(No response.)

SALAI: Are you in the privy?

(Goes offstage to check.)

(Salai returns.)

SALAI: (sing song) Where is he?! Where's my dear little child molester genius?

LEONARDO: (entering) In the closet.

SALAI: You mean that small room off the bedroom? What were you doing there?

LEONARDO: I noticed that the light is unusual in there. I was noting its properties.

SALAI: Always so curious, so busy. Aren't you glad to see me? You must have been lonely without me.

LEONARDO: Not especially.

SALAI: That's cold.

LEONARDO: I thought I told you not to come back.

SALAI: Oh, you always say that.

LEONARDO: This time I mean it.

SALAI: What couple doesn't have its ups and downs? How about a hug? (Opens his arms.) All is forgiven!

LEONARDO: (not hugging) Where did you go overnight?

SALAI: That's for me to know!

LEONARDO: Did you sleep on the streets?

SALAI: I stayed with the delightful Sisters of Perpetual Penitence. They have a convent with a guest room.

LEONARDO: Funny, I've never heard of them.

SALAI: Very cloistered, but lots of fun when you get to know them.

LEONARDO: Why don't I believe you?

SALAI: Because you're a very suspicious individual?

LEONARDO: Perhaps it's because of a lifetime of lies.

SALAI: Without my lies, our lives would be so tedious, don't you think?

LEONARDO: So that's how you think of it?

SALAI: I just try to spice things up in my small way.

LEONARDO: I'm sure the Devil tells himself the same thing.

SALAI: Oh, dear, now I'm the Devil?

LEONARDO: No. But you're working on it.

SALAI: Let me know when I'm there.

LEONARDO: Are you hungry?

SALAI: I ate a little something when I was gone – nun garbage, I think. But don't worry about me.

LEONARDO: I won't.

SALAI: By the way, I lost the laundry.

LEONARDO: Of course you did.

SALAI: One minute I had it, and then when I looked around, it was gone.

LEONARDO: Of course it was.

SALAI: I'll bet it was some citizen stealing your dirty clothing to make relics out of it – you know, relics of the True Leonardo. Ought to bring a pretty penny one day.

LEONARDO: I had some visitors while you were gone.

SALAI: Let me guess. Your mother?

LEONARDO: No.

SALAI: The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker?

LEONARDO: The butcher, yes, the others no. Have you been talking to him?

SALAI: No, why?

LEONARDO: He was very curious, that's all. He's on the town council.

SALAI: Is he?

LEONARDO: Are you sure that you didn't speak to him? Or anyone else?

SALAI: And risk my wondrous living arrangement?

LEONARDO: Isabella d'Este was also here. She wants a portrait of her in the worst way. I'm not going to finish it. She's too pushy.

SALAI: Let me finish it.

LEONARDO: Do you want to?

SALAI: Not really.

LEONARDO: It'll give you something to do.

SALAI: No. Have you got anything to eat?

LEONARDO: There are some carrots, maybe some leeks in the store room.

SALAI: (sarcastic) Yummy.

LEONARDO: If you're hungry enough.

SALAI: No bread? Olives? (He looks through the room, lifting things.) Cheese? Or should I say: Cheese! (Says as if taking a photo of him.)

LEONARDO: The bread is stale. As is your joke.

SALAI: And the olives are rancid. See what happens when your boy Salai is gone for one day!

LEONARDO: Without you, no doubt I'd starve. And with you, too.

SALAI: Why is it I sometimes get the feeling that you don't like me, Leonardo?

LEONARDO: Shall I count the ways?

SALAI: Only if you accompany yourself on the lyre.

LEONARDO: Oh, but you're much better at the liar than I am.

SALAI: Oh, Leonardo Da Vinci, aren't you just too much. And witty too!

LEONARDO: (singing without accompaniment) Salai! Salai! What a guy! What a guy!
Has never told a lie!

SALAI: Beauteous.

LEONARDO: And I had another visitor as well.

SALAI: Aren't you popular.

LEONARDO: Someday there will be a device so that people can transport their voices over long distances and thus keep in touch even when at home.

SALAI: Oh, don't be absurd!

LEONARDO: It's hardly absurd.

SALAI: Oh, of course what would I know!

LEONARDO: If it were left up to you, Salai, we'd still be living in mud huts.

SALAI: And who was this third visitor? God? Begging for a portrait?

LEONARDO: It was, but I told him there were already enough pictures of Him.

SALAI: Better be careful with the smart talk about God, boyfriend. You never know who's listening.

LEONARDO: It was Geramolo Melfi.

SALAI: Am I supposed to be impressed?

LEONARDO: Let's just say he's a big wig from up in Milan.

SALAI: (stops searching for food) This goddamned place is empty! I might as well be a fucking monk!

LEONARDO: Poor Salai. (He brings out some hidden fruits.)

SALAI: Thank you! (He begins to eat an apple.) So what did this Melfi fellow want?

LEONARDO: Oh, it's not important. I told him no – I think.

SALAI: You're not sure?

LEONARDO: It got a bit confused

SALAI: I should have been here to sort it out. See what happens when Salai is not around.

LEONARDO: It concerned his son, Francesco.

SALAI: The one who draws?

LEONARDO: You've heard of him?

SALAI: A little. . . . He doesn't want you to tutor his son, does he?

LEONARDO: I told him I was not taking on any new students.

SALAI: Oh, so now you're trying to replace me?!

LEONARDO: Salai, that is not what I said.

SALAI: I'm too old for you, is that it? How old is this Francesco – five?

LEONARDO: That's not fair, Salai. You know I never go below fifteen.

SALAI: Aren't you Virtue itself?

LEONARDO: One does not pick out what one is attracted to. Nature does.

SALAI: One does not have to act on every impulse one may feel either.

LEONARDO: You're right, and I don't.

SALAI: When is he moving in? Next Thursday?

LEONARDO: He's already here. He's in the cupboard under the stale bread.

SALAI: Well, introduce me! (calling) Francesco! Put away your little toys! Come, come!

LEONARDO: All right, enough of this. He's not moving in. Not yet.

SALAI: Can you at least wait until I die? Which shouldn't be that long!

LEONARDO: You're not going to die. He's not moving in. He's –

SALAI: You promise?

LEONARDO: I'm surprised to see you so . . . jealous, my boy. But I must confess I rather like it.

SALAI: Fuck you, Leonardo Da Vinci.

LEONARDO: I must say you keep me grounded.

SALAI: What's going to happen to me? I may really wind up sleeping on the streets, while you have who knows how many boys traipsing through this place, all so devoted to His Holiness here.

LEONARDO: Maybe you should have been nicer.

SALAI: Bring them on! I doubt they can compete with me.

LEONARDO: You'll always have a special place in my heart, you know that.

SALAI: Oh, shut the fuck up! What slop.

LEONARDO: It's not really a good idea to bite the hand that feeds you. Really.

SALAI: You think I can't survive on my own?

LEONARDO: Possibly.

SALAI: You bet your old ass I can survive. I don't need you. You need me. Soon you won't even be able to feed yourself. And who'll be there to stuff your carrots into your face? Salai, if you're lucky, that's who.

LEONARDO: I see myself on my death bed surrounded by my adoring patron and his many learned doctors.

SALAI: But you're still dying.

LEONARDO: But numbed by sweet syrups and a cornucopia of lavish praise and sincere and truly heartbreaking lamentation over my demise.

SALAI: I see my own death as coming -- from a duel with crossbows. (Mimes an arrow to his chest.) Dramatic, no?

LEONARDO: I don't know why, yet somehow that death seems appropriate for you.

SALAI: And forever after the world will beat a path to my graveside, decking it with candles and scribbled prayers and lamentations that will out flood your lamentations like the original Deluge versus a sewer overflow in Naples.

LEONARDO: We all have our delusions.

SALAI: (seriously) Seriously, how long do you think we both have left, Leonardo?

LEONARDO: Nineteen more years for me. Twenty-four for you.

SALAI: Sounds like you know. Do you have a crystal ball?

LEONARDO: It's just a guess.

LEONARDO: You know I'll stick with you, don't you?

LEONARDO: One can hope.

SALAI: I will. I promise.

LEONARDO: And you may not even be lying this time.

34

SALAI: (seriously) I'm not.

(There is a moment of genuine concern from each one.)

SALAI: Do you think we will go to Hel for what we've done?

LEONARDO: You will. I won't.

SALAI: My sins are petty. Yours . . .

LEONARDO: Given my predilections, I have been ethical.

SALAI: So have I, given that my predilections are toward mischief, stealing, and lying!

LEONARDO: Knowing you, Salai, you will talk your way into Heaven, no matter what God or St. Peter may say.

SALAI: If you behave yourself and let me come back here to stay, I might put in a good word for you up there. (Points up to Heaven.) I'll say, Leonardo just couldn't help himself. I was just so darling.

LEONARDO: You know what the problem is, Salai?

SALAI: What?

LEONARDO: Most men have more sperm than they know what to do with.

SALAI: (Laughs.) So can I stay? Pretty please!

LEONARDO: No.

SALAI: (Throws the apple across the room, but not directly at Leonardo.) Can I stay?

LEONARDO: Yes.

SALAI: Thank you.

LEONARDO: Where's a crossbow when you need it?

SALAI: I'm going to bed.

LEONARDO: Sleep tight.

SALAI: You too. Alone?

LEONARDO: Of course.

35

SALAI: You can have some ass if you like. (Smiles.)

LEONARDO: Good night.

SALAI: (Does not move.) Good night, my love.

BLACKOUT

INTERMISSION

ACT II

SCENE 1

(Nineteen years later, 1519)

(Everybody has aged appropriately, except for the dead, and turned into a somewhat different version of themselves.)

(Leonardo's studio at Amboise, in the court of the French governor. It is just as messy as the previous studio, with a touch or two of upgrade. The unfinished painting is still on the easel. There is now a bed with a back raised up with pillows, upstage.)

ISABELLA: (Sweeping in, going immediately to the painting on the easel, examining it.) You fucker! You still haven't finished! Maybe I'll finish it myself. (Grabs a paintbrush, aims it at the easel, then stops.) I must say it takes courage to apply paint in just the right places. (Examines the painting more closely.)

(Enter Leonardo, now frail, with a cane and a big, white beard.)

LEONARDO: Like what you see?

ISABELLA: The smile is kind of funny, if you really want to know.

LEONARDO: I'll change it at once.

ISABELLA: Far be it from me to interfere. How are you, Leonardo?

LEONARDO: As well as can be expected at sixty-seven in the year 1519.

ISABELLA: Shall I pray for your soul then?

LEONARDO: I don't suppose it can hurt.

ISABELLA: Do you like it here?

LEONARDO: The French governor is very kind to me.

ISABELLA: I would have been kind to you if you had come to Mantua and stayed with me.

LEONARDO: No doubt. But I would have had to pay.

ISABELLA: Don't be silly. I wouldn't have charged you a florin.

LEONARDO: Nevertheless, I would have had to pay a price.

ISABELLA: Oh, pooh! I would have made sure you did more paintings. That's for sure.

LEONARDO: Most likely true.

ISABELLA: So there would have been more pictures of women!

LEONARDO: I did a lot of women.

ISABELLA: But there can never be enough women in pictures. At least half of all paintings should be of women.

LEONARDO: I don't think it works out that way.

ISABELLA: Oh, for God's sake, Madonna and Child, Madonna and Child – do you think women are nothing but mothers?!

LEONARDO: No.

ISABELLA: Or sluts. On divans.

LEONARDO: Never.

ISABELLA: I'll tell you why men don't paint women! Because they're paid by men, that's why!

LEONARDO: I've had offers from women to paint them.

ISABELLA: Are you referring to me?

LEONARDO: Never.

ISABELLA: But *no!* Don't paint me!

LEONARDO: You do have an interesting face.

ISABELLA: That's why you should finish my portrait. Women are so much more interesting than men.

LEONARDO: *As* interesting, no doubt.

ISABELLA: No, *more* interesting.

LEONARDO: Perhaps a time will come, Isabella, when others will feel as you do.

ISABELLA: Right! A second Renaissance!

LEONARDO: I am sure the reasons why who gets painted and who doesn't are complex and perhaps even suspect, tainted by class, money, appetite, opportunity, and everything else under the sun. But in your case, madam, I did not paint you because you're a bully.

ISABELLA: It's for women! It's not for myself! For women!

LEONARDO: Oh, for God's sake, Isabella, give it a rest.

ISABELLA: I will not give it a rest. Why is your bed out here now? (She goes to it.)

LEONARDO: I find it easier to get to these days.

ISABELLA: Are you sick? How sick?

LEONARDO: Let's just say I'm not feeling my oats any longer.

ISABELLA: It's that vegetarian diet. I think it also made you gay.

LEONARDO: And how's your health, Isabella?

ISABELLA: I'm aging. I hate aging. Why didn't you paint me when I wasn't aging?

LEONARDO: I did the chalk drawing.

ISABELLA: And that's all you did! All my pleading – for naught! I didn't even get the goddamned chalk drawing! Are you going to leave it to me? Do you still have it? You can leave it to me in your will. Do you have a will?

LEONARDO: I'm working on it.

ISABELLA: Well, who better to leave it to than the subject – me? That's the least you could do.

LEONARDO: We shall see.

ISABELLA: It's about the only way anybody is ever going to hear of me once I'm gone. They'll hear about you, but what about yours truly?

LEONARDO: I'm not sure exactly where it is.

ISABELLA: Oh, great! Why can't you get it through your head that I want to be in a big, important gallery or some such?! You didn't paint it to have it hidden away under your clutter.

LEONARDO: I admit I only did it because you kept pestering me.

ISABELLA: I'll have you know that Isabella d'Este doesn't have to "pester" anybody to get her portrait done! What nerve! I'll bet I could do a better portrait myself if I wanted to.

LEONARDO: I'm sure you could, madam. Here. (Hands her a paintbrush.) Be my guest.

ISABELLA: (Takes the paintbrush.) Wouldn't you just poop your pants if I suddenly started painting and I was even better than you?!

LEONARDO: You can be anything you want to be, I'm sure.

ISABELLA: Shit! (Throws the paintbrush to the floor.)

LEONARDO: I'm sure there is not another Isabella d'Este. Unique! Who could ever capture her?!

ISABELLA: Oh, don't throw me any scraps, Da Vinci. Who do you think you're fooling?!

LEONARDO: I would never, never try to fool you, Isabella.

ISABELLA: Where's Salai?

LEONARDO: He's out.

ISABELLA: And that other one, Francesco Something?

LEONARDO: He's also out, on an errand.

ISABELLA: So he worked out? How old is he now?

LEONARDO: Old enough. All grown up.

ISABELLA: Quite the little ménage you have around here.

LEONARDO: It's not what you think. We've all moved on in our lives.

ISABELLA: I wish my husband would. But, no, he still gets a hard-on if I so much as say, How's it hanging, Gonzaga?

LEONARDO: To be honest, I have always found the sex act, or acts, of whatever nature, to be rather ludicrous. Don't you?

ISABELLA: Don't get me started. You may not believe this, but when I was first married, I had no notion at all about what was to befall me. I couldn't believe that my husband wanted to stick that thing in me – and he'd been so nice up to then.

LEONARDO: I held off as long as I could, but then my urges simply would no longer be contained.

ISABELLA: I found out soon enough that if I was patient and just laid there, it would be over in no time.

LEONARDO: Me too. Sort of.

ISABELLA: I couldn't believe that it may my husband *so* happy, no matter how long or little it lasted.

LEONARDO: (Banging his hand) Thump, thump, WEEE!!

ISABELLA: Precisely.

LEONARDO: I always preferred dissecting a body to sex.

ISABELLA: Well, I wouldn't go that far. Maybe my husband will pop off one of these days, and I can really give it a rest.

LEONARDO: Of course he could still have an erection even if he's dead.

ISABELLA: I wouldn't put it past the bugger.

(They share a laugh.)

LEONARDO: I must say I don't envy you, men always trying to get in your . . .

ISABELLA: It's like swatting away flies. Quite tiresome at times.

LEONARDO: I'm sure you're very good at it.

ISABELLA: Meaning what?

LEONARDO: Putting men off.

ISABELLA: I'm good at other things too.

LEONARDO: No doubt.

ISABELLA: Now what is that supposed to mean?

LEONARDO: Isabella, you are maddening.

ISABELLA: Of course I can likewise get most men to do anything I ask, simply because they think they might get a poke or even just a grab at my grass.

LEONARDO: I've noticed.

ISABELLA: I bet that portrait of me would have been completed if you'd wanted some of my grass, *n'est pas?*

LEONARDO: Who can say? I've heard the grass is greener on the other side.

ISABELLA: That's why I've always liked you, Da Vinci, even if you frustrate me. You can't be manipulated like most ordinary men.

LEONARDO: And I must give you credit for never quitting when you want something.

ISABELLA: How much longer do you think you have?

LEONARDO: Do you mean to live?

ISABELLA: Yes.

LEONARDO: A day and a half.

ISABELLA: Really?

LEONARDO: Metaphorically. A day doesn't seem to last as long as it used to.

ISABELLA: I know what you mean. I was just twenty-six two moments ago, and now I'm forty-five. How did that happen?

LEONARDO: But a very youthful forty-five.

ISABELLA: But of course! (Strikes a pose.) Actually, I'm starting to forget things, my friend.

LEONARDO: Oh?

ISABELLA: In fact, it's gotten quite bad. Just this morning I forgot the name of one of my children, the boy.

LEONARDO: How awful. Did he notice?

ISABELLA: Oh, what's-his-name hardly notices anything! Such a dull boy. I blame it on his father's side.

(They both laugh.)

LEONARDO: It certainly makes me regret not having children of my own.

ISABELLA: Children are like biscotti.

LEONARDO: How so?

ISABELLA: Good as a thought, but hard on the figure. And the gums.

LEONARDO: I'm sure there are many compensations.

ISABELLA: There must be. But what? Tell me! Tell me!

LEONARDO: The human race must go on, I suppose.

ISABELLA: I suppose.

LEONARDO: Sometimes I feel as if are not very specific, each of us; rather, following a plan we don't even understand.

ISABELLA: That's why we feel compelled to leave something behind, e.g., my portrait.

LEONARDO: But how long does even the best oil last?

ISABELLA: Oh, don't tell me that! I have to believe in something.

LEONARDO: Perhaps I'm wrong. One day there may be a preservative that truly preserves.

ISABELLA: I hope so, my friend. I hope so. I can't stand the thought of losing my beauty, my memory, with nothing at all to remain. Nothing.

LEONARDO: A dull son?

ISABELLA: The girl is a little better, but not much.

LEONARDO: If she takes after her mother, she must be a delight.

ISABELLA: I can't remember her name either. Oh, Da Vinci, my mind really is going. I can't stand the thought of becoming a . . . The small humiliations now, the bigger ones to come. (She cries.)

LEONARDO: Does somebody need her hand held?

ISABELLA: Indeed, you may hold my hand, my friend. (Holds out her hand.)

(He goes to her and hugs her, and she hugs back.)

LEONARDO: Better?

ISABELLA: Better. . . . And what is your name again?

LEONARDO: Your friend.

(They smile sadly at one another.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

(Enter Cesare Borgia, now dead. He carries a box big enough to carry a cabbage.)

BORGIA: (announcing himself) It is I, Cesare Borgia! (Nobody is there.) Where is a trumpet when you need one?!

LEONARDO: (entering) What are you doing here, my lord? I thought you died.

BORGIA: I did indeed.

LEONARDO: It was a majestic death, I trust.

BORGIA: Unfortunately no. A minor skirmish somewhere.

LEONARDO: I'm sorry. But you were young and handsome, not old and haggard, when you went.

BORGIA: True. I guess that's something. I wanted to have these words engraved on my tombstone: "He couldn't wait!"

LEONARDO: That's good.

BORGIA: Didn't get around to it, alas.

LEONARDO: I'm sorry that I was such a disappointment to you when I finally came into your employ.

BORGIA: You were. Quite a big talker, you. A bit faulty on the actual delivery. But that's all blood under the bridge now.

LEONARDO: Why is it that everything you say always has a tinge to it, as if it might not be true? Or might be sinister?

BORGIA: It's that book that fellow wrote using me as a terrible example.

LEONARDO: You mean *The Prince*?

BORGIA: I thought it was called *The Art of the Deal*!

LEONARDO: I must read it one of these days.

BORGIA: Don't judge a book by its subject. I came to see you, Da Vinci, because I heard that you were dying.

LEONARDO: I'm flattered.

BORGIA: Yes, but are you dying?

LEONARDO: Who of us knows how much time is left?

BORGIA: I always knew that I would die young. I was too impulsive, too . . .

LEONARDO: . . . violent?

BORGIA: I like to finish my own sentences, Da Vinci.

LEONARDO: Sorry. Just like I like to finish my own paintings.

BORGIA: Are you still working on that thing? (Goes to the easel to check.)

LEONARDO: Your verdict?

BORGIA: Not my type, but I like that smudging you do around the chin.

LEONARDO: Thank you. Too many painters make the line there too harsh. Softer is better.

BORGIA: Why is the bed out here? Have you finally come out of the closet?

LEONARDO: For convenience.

BORGIA: I never slept more than an hour at a time in my entire life and certainly not out in the open like this. Too many enemies.

LEONARDO: I'm sorry to hear that.

BORGIA: Oh, no, no, no, my friend. I think the good life is based on how many enemies a man earns in his life, not how many friends. It means you stood for something.

LEONARDO: I could, of course, never disagree with the great Cesare Borgia.

BORGIA: Of course you couldn't.

LEONARDO: I might die even sooner than expected.

BORGIA: How unfair to me you are, my friend. I am but a poor ghost of myself these days. I could hardly do harm to you now, even if I wanted to.

LEONARDO: I bet you know some tricks, even from the grave.

BORGIA: Aha! You bet I do. Your sweet red wines, rather than your whites, are far better for those lingering poisonings that are always so satisfying. Present company excepted, naturally.

LEONARDO: I defer to your expertise.

BORGIA: You disappointed me, yes, when I needed your proposed weapons, but I don't hold a grudge. In fact, I have brought you a gift, Da Vinci. All is forgiven! (Holds out the box.)

LEONARDO: Really? What a surprise! What is it?

BORGIA: It wouldn't be a surprise if I told you before you opened it, would it?

LEONARDO: (Shakes the box.) Jewelry? (Shakes it again.) Shrapnel?

BORGIA: I thought of you as soon as I saw it.

LEONARDO: Now what can it be? (Opens the box.) Oh, it's a human head!

BORGIA: You like it?

LEONARDO: (looking more closely) My god, it really is a human head.

BORGIA: I remembered that you like to dissect things. It was the last person I managed to behead before that little skirmish. I had my quartermaster gift wrap it for you.

LEONARDO: It's splendid! I love it! Male or female?

BORGIA: I was too polite to ask.

LEONARDO: I like androgynous.

BORGIA: That's what I'd heard.

LEONARDO: I'll get to it by tomorrow for sure. I do want to try to finish that before I can't. (Nods at the painting on the easel.)

BORGIA: I'm glad you like it.

LEONARDO: Yes, and thank you, thank you.

BORGIA: I can always get you more if that goes bad. I know some people.

LEONARDO: I'll definitely keep that in mind.

BORGIA: So, Leonardo, my good friend, what are you doing to make sure you don't die?

LEONARDO: Not that much. To tell the truth, I'm ready to die.

BORGIA: Don't be silly. You can make it to eighty. I hear leeches are good.

LEONARDO: To eat?

BORGIA: They suck out the bad blood.

LEONARDO: I did not know that.

BORGIA: I'll send you some leeches. I know some people.

LEONARDO: You're a good man, Cesare Borgia.

BORGIA: I'll make sure they're healthy ones. The last thing you want is a bad leech.

LEONARDO: I'm sure.

BORGIA: Speaking of which, where's Salai?

LEONARDO: Out.

BORGIA: Of course he is.

LEONARDO: He's getting some commissions for his own work now.

BORGIA: Is he? But is he looking after his old master properly?

46

LEONARDO: Oh, you know how artists are, very self-centered.

BORGIA: I think he's twisted you around his little finger for ages.

LEONARDO: He's all right. We've managed to work out our differences.

BORGIA: They're not mine, but is he servicing *your* needs at least?

LEONARDO: Thank you for enquiring, but I'd rather . . .

BORGIA: Oh, don't be bourgeois, my friend. Sex only matters when you don't get it.

LEONARDO: Did you ever have a boy, my lord?

BORGIA: I don't think so. Ever have a woman?

LEONARDO: I don't think so.

(They have a laugh together.)

LEONARDO: Do you mind if I ask another personal question?

BORGIA: Shoot.

LEONARDO: You're dead, correct?

BORGIA: So they tell me.

LEONARDO: Are you in Hell?

BORGIA: How can you tell – after you've been on Earth?

LEONARDO: Is that a joke?

BORGIA: Let's just say I haven't notice extra fire on my body.

LEONARDO: No torments?

BORGIA: Just the usual – toothache, pinkeye, scrofula.

LEONARDO: I've had those!

BORGIA: Pleurisy, hemorrhoids, stinky urine.

LEONARDO: Yes!

BORGIA: Infected nasal cavity, cholera, polyps.

LEONARDO: Not yet!

BORGIA: Shall I go on?

LEONARDO: So you're saying that Hell is not that different.

BORGIA: Maybe I'm still in Purgatory. Nobody tells me anything.

LEONARDO: I thought things were supposed to be much clearer after death.

BORGIA: I do feel a kind of vague disappointment about everything. Is that Hell?

LEONARDO: I feel that all the time. That's why I try to keep so busy.

BORGIA: Actually, I've had that feeling my entire life.

LEONARDO: Me too!

(They high-five.)

LEONARDO: I've always felt there might be exaggeration about the Afterlife, to keep some – many? – from misbehaving.

BORGIA: It didn't keep you from seducing boys, though, did it?

LEONARDO: I liked to look at them. I was never that interested in . . . other stuff.

BORGIA: You can tell me, Da Vinci. I'm very non-judgmental. Besides I'm dead and you're about to be. It won't leave this room, I assure you.

LEONARDO: I do wonder if I will be terribly punished for the few times I have sinned, deliberately sinned.

BORGIA: Did you use force?

LEONARDO: Never.

BORGIA: Why not? I did.

LEONARDO: I wanted to be desired, wanted others to come to me of their own free will.

BORGIA: But you were Leonardo Da Vinci, you held the power.

LEONARDO: They tried to exploit me as much as I did them.

BORGIA: Oh, don't be afraid to embrace your sins, my friend.

LEONARDO: I think I can truly say that I never initiated a sexual favor from anyone during my whole life.

BORGIA: Bullshit!

LEONARDO: It's not bullshit.

BORGIA: In all the vast sewer of sins in the history of the world I'm sure yours are not that egregious.

LEONARDO: Some might say my particular sins merit a special punishment.

BORGIA: I doubt that.

LEONARDO: I can even see them destroying my whole *oeuvre* – everything – once I'm dead because of what they think I did with boys.

BORGIA: Fuck them!

LEONARDO: To tell the truth, I think I worked so hard and was so wide-ranging in what I did because I felt I had to make up in some way for my impulses.

BORGIA: Well, then the world should be grateful that you had such impulses. Otherwise, they wouldn't have your legacy, and we'd all be the poorer for it.

LEONARDO: Are you the Devil, Cesare Borgia, luring me with tempting words to the lingering horrors of Hell because I have not truly repented?

BORGIA: Of course not. Why do people think their souls are so in demand? They're a soldi a dozen, if they exist at all. Which I doubt.

LEONARDO: You doubt there's a soul?

BORGIA: I've never seen one. Have you?

LEONARDO: No. Believe me I've looked.

BORGIA: It's just another attempt by humankind to inflate its importance. Here I am in Hell and I no Devils are gloating they have my immortal soul at last.

LEONARDO: Perhaps there is a waiting period?

BORGIA: Perhaps I'm in Heaven!

LEONARDO: Is that possible?

BORGIA: I did make a full confession before I went. Maybe that saved me. Maybe you'd better make one, my friend, before it's too late?

LEONARDO: It hardly seems fair for someone like you – reportedly – to get off and others don't because they weren't able to confess at the last minute.

BORGIA: Who said this world is fair? I learned early on that it is not. The world belongs to those who take it.

LEONARDO: And you took it.

BORGIA: At least until that little skirmish that didn't turn out so well when I was only thirty-one.

LEONARDO: I have tried to pray off and on over the years. I even tried kneeling at my bed a week ago.

BORGIA: And?

LEONARDO: I don't think anyone was listening.

BORGIA: Do you want to confess to me, my friend?

LEONARDO: Are you a priest?

BORGIA: A cardinal, actually. I know people.

LEONARDO: Your father, right?

BORGIA: He insisted I call him Your Holiness. What a guy! All right, tell me your sins. Let's sit. (He pulls up two chairs. Leonardo sits in one, Borgia in the other.)

LEONARDO: Shall I start with the venial?

BORGIA: If you like.

LEONARDO: Let me think. I once put a scratch on one of Michelangelo's frescos, when we were painting in the same place.

BORGIA: Maybe that's a mortal sin.

LEONARDO: Really? He was a prick.

BORGIA: Michelangelo is pretty big, I hear. Let's leave it. What else?

LEONARDO: I spat on one of Raphael's angels, at a showing. Nobody else was around.

BORGIA: Why?

50

LEONARDO: I was jealous. I thought his angels were cuter than mine.

BORGIA: God, you artists are as bad as me, in your own way.

LEONARDO: I like this. It feels good. I also faked an orgasm with Salai once.

BORGIA: I think that's probably venial. Let's stick with the mortal. I bet you don't have any.

LEONARDO: I do too! One time, when I was much younger, I cheated on a test.

BORGIA: Leonardo Da Vinci cheated on a test?

LEONARDO: I was very good at most things, but my arithmetic was poor. I managed to hide it for years.

BORGIA: Did you get caught cheating on this test?

LEONARDO: No. I was the teacher's pet.

BORGIA: And it's bothered you ever since.

LEONARDO: Yes.

BORGIA: Anything else?

LEONARDO: I never finished Isabell d'Este's portrait.

BORGIA: And that's a sin?

LEONARDO: I didn't do it out of spite.

BORGIA: No biggy. Are you telling me the worst ones?

LEONARDO: I kissed a girl in Verona once.

BORGIA: And this is a mortal sin why?

LEONARDO: I was pretending I was interested.

BORGIA: You sure that's all? You seem a little short on sins overall.

LEONARDO: I fondled the curls of a boy in Milan. He was fourteen and a half.

BORGIA: What was the age of consent in Milan at that time?

LEONARDO: I don't know.

51

BORGIA: Fondled curls, huh?

LEONARDO: Yes.

BORGIA: Where were these curls, high up or low down?

LEONARDO: High up.

BORGIA: Did he tell you to stop?

LEONARDO: Yes. Once.

BORGIA: And did you stop?

LEONARDO: No.

BORGIA: Did he tell you to stop a second time?

LEONARDO: I forget.

BORGIA: Come on, Leonardo! Did he didn't he tell you to stop a second time?

LEONARDO: His word was "no." But there was "yes, yes" in his eyes.

BORGIA: Yeah, I know the type. You know what? I've heard enough. I'm going to forgive all your sins, both venial and mortal, because I can. (Makes a quick sign of the cross.) Go and sin no more, my son. Always ask for a birth certificate if you want to fondle any more curls, okay?

BLACKOUT

SCENE THREE

(Leonardo is reading.)

(There is a knock at the door.)

(He goes to answer it.)

(Enter the Butcher, followed by Leonardo.)

BUTCHER: It's nice to see you again, Mr. Da Vinci. Do you remember me?

LEONARDO: You're Luigi the butcher. From Florence.

BUTCHER: Oh, you must have me confused with somebody else. I hear you've been ill. Maybe that's the reason. Actually, I am from the future and my name is Captain Vespa of the Vice Squad of this area.

LEONARDO: Vice Squad? Perhaps I am a bit confused.

BUTCHER: Actually, I'm sort of a jack of all trades. In these parts, because the jurisdiction is so small, I handle many different issues.

LEONARDO: Are you here to give me reparations for being gay? I hear they're doing that in some places now.

BUTCHER: Really? How amazing.

LEONARDO: I was arrested twice in my youth.

BUTCHER: Were you?

LEONARDO: I was hoping to have those two expunged and maybe receive a few florin for what were consensual sexual acts. Most of mine were.

BUTCHER: My, you've got the wrong Vice Squad!

LEONARDO: I have?

BUTCHER: You have. But thanks for that information.

LEONARDO: Perhaps I should slap my face and you'll disappear. Get rid of the cobwebs.

BUTCHER: You can try that. Or I can slap it for you. Whichever (Holds his hand as if to slap Leonardo.)

LEONARDO: Do you have any identification?

BUTCHER: Of course. (Takes out a badge and flashes it so quickly Leonardo can't possibly read it.)

LEONARDO: I couldn't read that.

BUTCHER: Failing a bit, are you?

LEONARDO: I think you should leave, sir. Let me show you the door.

BUTCHER: I know where the door is. I just came through it.

LEONARDO: Since you're imaginary, I don't think I have much to say to you, sir.

BUTCHER: But I have much to say to you, sir. Where are your *companions*, by the way?

LEONARDO: I'm sure I don't know. I rarely see them. They lead their own lives.

BUTCHER: Do they now? It's my understanding that a certain Salai, as he is called, resides at this address. Quite a nice address, I must say.

LEONARDO: Yes, it is. You might say I know people.

BUTCHER: I bet you do! Are you aware that your companion, your housemate, whatever, has been arrested?

LEONARDO: Arrested? For what?

BUTCHER: What would you guess?

LEONARDO: I have no idea.

BUTCHER: It's not for *that*.

LEONARDO: Whatever *that* is.

BUTCHER: It's for shoplifting.

LEONARDO: That's ridiculous. He has his own money, and I give him money as well.

BUTCHER: That's what he says. And yet he could not resist stealing some oranges from a shop today.

LEONARDO: How many and how much? I'll pay you. (Goes for some money.) I have some money around here, somewhere. (Not sure where it is.)

BUTCHER: Oh, don't trouble yourself. It's too late to pay anyway.

LEONARDO: It can't be that much, for mere oranges.

BUTCHER: Imported oranges, all the way from Florida.

LEONARDO: Never heard of it. You're making up these charges!

BUTCHER: I'm afraid I am not. I am from the police. (Shows the badge again, much too fast to read.)

LEONARDO: Is Salai in jail?

BUTCHER: I'm afraid he is.

LEONARDO: I will bail him out.

BUTCHER: I know – you *know* people. Well, people know you too, both you and Salai. And it's not a pretty sight, believe me. We've had our eye on you and your studio for some time. It is a veritable den of perversion.

LEONARDO: This is just a bad dream. (Shakes his head.)

BUTCHER: Probably your worst nightmare. Salai has leveled some charges against you.

LEONARDO: I don't believe that. What kind of charges?

BUTCHER: What might you think they are?

LEONARDO: I suppose they might be . . . (Changes his mind.) That I taught him how to paint.

BUTCHER: Did you? (Points to easel.) Is that a painting?

LEONARDO: It's not finished. Don't look at it.

BUTCHER: (Goes to look at the painting anyway.) (Stares at it.)

LEONARDO: Well?

BUTCHER: Is that a pregnant woman?

LEONARDO: No.

BUTCHER: Is it a man dressed as a woman?

LEONARDO: No.

BUTCHER: Is it in 3-D?

LEONARDO: No.

BUTCHER: Is it paint by number?

LEONARDO: No.

BUTCHER: Can I take a picture of it? (Whips out a camera.)

LEONARDO: No. You can take a picture e of it?!

BUTCHER: You'd be surprised what I can take a picture of, Mr. Da Vinci.

LEONARDO: You mean my studio?

BUTCHER: I don't suppose there is any incriminating evidence around here, is there?

LEONARDO: I don't know what you mean.

BUTCHER: Anything like shoplifted items, previously shoplifted items?

LEONARDO: I have a patron. I have no need to shoplift.

BUTCHER: Perhaps you get a certain thrill out of it.

LEONARDO: I don't know what you're talking about.

BUTCHER: May I look around?

LEONARDO: Do you have a warrant?

BUTCHER: What's that?

LEONARDO: Permission to search.

BUTCHER: You must be joking.

LEONARDO: You can't just barge in here and look wherever you want to!

BUTCHER: Yes, I can. (Flashes his badge again very fast.)

LEONARDO: I still can't read that.

BUTCHER: You'd better get your eyes fixed, Mr. D.

LEONARDO: I better I know more about vision than you can ever hope to.

BUTCHER: And yet you can't read a simple, little badge. Do I smell oranges, old oranges?

LEONARDO: Would you like one, one of my old oranges?

BUTCHER: You admit that you have some?

LEONARDO: I have old oranges, old carrots, old leeks. I am very bad at throwing anything away. None of them are shoplifted.

BUTCHER: That's funny. Your "tutee" Salai tells me that you are in charge of all the shoplifting in these parts.

LEONARDO: I don't believe he's told you any such thing.

BUTCHER: No? You're not really sure, are you? That Salai will say just about anything, don't you think? Especially if it will save his own . . . what's the word? Ass?

LEONARDO: Can I see Salai?

56

BUTCHER: No.

LEONARDO: I will come down to the jail.

BUTCHER: No, you won't.

LEONARDO: I will bail him out.

BUTCHER: I'm sure you wish to save his ass, but the shop owner wants to bring charges.

LEONARDO: Who is it? I will talk with him. He, I'm sure, will be reasonable.

BUTCHER: I doubt that. I'm the shop owner.

LEONARDO: You're the shop owner, the Vice Squad, and the police?

BUTCHER: Like you, I'm a multi-tasker. (Laughs.)

LEONARDO: Okay, what can I do to get Salai out of jail?

BUTCHER: Let me think. (Goes back to the painting.) How about this painting?

LEONARDO: What about it? No, it's not a portrait of a shoplifter.

BUTCHER: What if you gave it to me?

LEONARDO: You're kidding!

BUTCHER: In exchange for Salai's freedom.

LEONARDO: I've put years into that.

BUTCHER: Salai wept when I locked him out. It was most pitiful.

LEONARDO: What is the penalty for shoplifting?

BUTCHER: Death.

LEONARDO: It can't be.

BUTCHER: It is. The oranges are from Florida. But possibly we can . . .

LEONARDO: You like the painting that much?

BUTCHER: It's just okay, but I think it might look good with my drapes.

LEONARDO: How do I know you'll be as good as your word, if I were to hand over the painting to you?

BUTCHER: You don't. My, how your poor Salai wept like a villainous baby when I turned the key.

LEONARDO: Salai never wept a moment in his life.

BUTCHER: And he cried out for his teacher. "Da Vinci will save me!" he whimpered.

LEONARDO: It doesn't sound like the Salai I know. Perhaps you have the wrong man.

BUTCHER: Jail does strange things to a man, Mr. D. I don't recommend it.

LEONARDO: Is that a threat?

BUTCHER: Bad things have been known to happen to men while in jail. Unwanted things, even for a certain kind of man who enjoys things that normal men can't imagine.

LEONARDO: I am old. I think I'm safe.

BUTCHER: Don't be so sure, my esteemed friend. To somebody horny enough, your hole's as good as anybody's. In fact, I'd guess that there might even be quite a few who would love to brag that they fucked the great Leonardo Da Vinci up the ass. *N'est pas?*

LEONARDO: You are unspeakable.

BUTCHER: It takes one to know one.

LEONARDO: Oh, god, I don't know what to do.

BUTCHER: There is the painting. (Nods at it.) If it doesn't match the drapes, I suppose I can always sell it, perhaps to a collector. You'd like to be collected, wouldn't you?

LEONARDO: It depends on who it is.

BUTCHER: There's a good chance you'll die and your works will wind up in a trash heap somewhere, ripped apart and covered with orange peels and dog shit.

LEONARDO: Salai will look after my works.

BUTCHER: Salai will be dead, either in prison or from a duel with a crossbow. Trust me.

LEONARDO: Then my other remaining student, Francesco, will look after them.

BUTCHER: But will he? Where is Francesco right now?

LEONARDO: He's visiting his father.

BUTCHER: I wouldn't count on him returning. Your kind aren't likely to be reliable, are they?

LEONARDO: Leave this place, sir. Leave it now!

58

BUTCHER: Without the painting and poor Salai still languishing in jail?

LEONARDO: (quietly) Leave before I kill you!

BUTCHER: Good day, my friend. (He laughs and laughs.) Oh, I forgot something. To match my drapes!

(The Butcher takes the painting off the easel and hurries out.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE FOUR

(Leonardo is sobbing.)

(Enter his mother's ghost.)

CATERINA: What is it, my boy?

LEONARDO: A bad man stole my painting.

CATERINA: He did?! That's terrible.

LEONARDO: Can you get it back for me?

CATERINA: How old are you now, Leonardo?

LEONARDO: Sixty-seven.

CATERINA: Don't you think it's time for you to handle things like this yourself?

LEONARDO: Yes, I should have long ago, but now I'm too old.

CATERINA: (holds her arms out) Come to your mama!

LEONARDO: But the bad man is running away!

CATERINA: Shhh, shhhh. (She hugs him.)

LEONARDO: Do you think I'm a mama's boy?

CATERINA: Of course not. You're the perfect son.

LEONARDO: Thank you, Mama.

CATERINA: But there are some things we ought to talk about, now that you are as old as you are. Come sit with me. (Leads him to two chairs.)

LEONARDO: What is it, Mama? Am I going to die?

CATERINA: One day. Everybody dies, one day.

LEONARDO: But there's so much more to accomplish. I can't die yet!

CATERINA: I know that you want to learn everything and do everything, my bright, shining son, but I'm afraid even you won't be able to solve every issue there is.

LEONARDO: I should have concentrated more on one thing.

CATERINA: You couldn't have concentrated on one thing if your soul depended upon it.

LEONARDO: You know me better than anyone, Mama. What was I like as a boy?

CATERINA: As a boy? You were inquisitive. You kept asking why the sky was blue.

LEONARDO: Did I?

CATERINA: Most people just accept that the sky is blue, but you had to know *why*.

LEONARDO: I think I know why now.

CATERINA: I'm sure you do, son. I'm sure you do.

LEONARDO: What else? Was I a sad child?

CATERINA: Not especially. You were too busy to be sad.

LEONARDO: I think I was sadder than I let on.

CATERINA: We're all sadder than we let on, Leonardo. Human beings have an unspoken agreement not to say they're sad.

LEONARDO: I knew it!

CATERINA: And yet they keep trying to cure that sadness – by eating and drinking too much, or by praying to this god or to that god, or by laughing too much at the absurdity of it all, or by –

LEONARDO: -- by drawing or painting or sculpting!

CATERINA: Most likely. Or by having children. That's what I did.

LEONARDO: Were you ashamed of me, Mama?

CATERINA: Who could be ashamed of such a talented little boy?

LEONARDO: I was different from the other children.

CATERINA: There were times when I wished you would just stop asking so many questions and eat your porridge and shut up.

LEONARDO: But you never told me to be quiet. I know that.

CATERINA: I hid your notepad – and more than once.

LEONARDO: I wondered where that went!

CATERINA: You stayed inside more than I thought was healthy.

LEONARDO: Get out and blow the stink off! That's what you used to say to me.

CATERINA: And eventually you did. I have to tell you, my boy, that I was very glad when you showed such an interest in eddies and water swirls and all that – it gave you some fresh air.

LEONARDO: How did you feel about the dissected body parts?

CATERINA: I confess it wasn't among my favorite things you did. But at least you didn't kill anybody to get them. Did you?

LEONARDO: No, Mama. They were already dead.

CATERINA: I'm pleased to hear that. I wasn't sure.

LEONARDO: Were you not curious about the nature of things, Mama?

CATERINA: Not very much.

LEONARDO: Never?

CATERINA: I did wonder about the nature of love.

LEONARDO: Like the love between my papa and you? Now, there was a love!

CATERINA: Oh, it was not love we had, my boy. Not love.

LEONARDO: But that's what you always said.

CATERINA: It was your father's lust for a fourteen-year-old girl, combined with the hopes of a poverty-stricken, fourteen-year-old orphan. There was hardly room for love!

LEONARDO: You didn't love papa?

CATERINA: Leonardo Da Vinci, you're sixty-seven years old and close to the end of your life. It's time you knew something beyond dissected bodies and why the sky is blue.

LEONARDO: I don't think I want to hear this.

CATERINA: I did not love your father, although I convinced myself I did. Women do that. Maybe some men do too. I'm not sure.

LEONARDO: But you had a child with him.

CATERINA: Do you think love is all airy and grand and unfleshy? Surely, you must know better, my darling. I had some lustful thoughts of my own, naturally, but nothing compared to your father's. And I was poor and without promise. Your father gave me a way up, and I took it.

LEONARDO: And he disappointed you by not marrying you.

CATERINA: He promised to many times, but I knew he wouldn't. He would marry into the class he had to marry into. He supported me – and you – because he was a decent man. And then he had me married off to somebody “appropriate.” I didn't love that man either, but at least he did not beat me. I had more than most.

LEONARDO: I did not know all this, Mama.

CATERINA: Of course you didn't. I didn't want you to.

LEONARDO: And you cleaned and you cooked and you looked after me, and I took it all for granted.

CATERINA: I don't suppose you could help being who you were, my dear. Nor could I.

LEONARDO: Oh, Mama, you are making me sad. I do not want to die sad.

CATERINA: Why does it make you sad? I thought you loved knowledge of all kinds, my sweet genius. Life is more than science. It is what it is, and my life and yours were what they were.

LEONARDO: So my life is over then? You said it wasn't.

CATERINA: I lied.

LEONARDO: How much longer do you think I have?

CATERINA: A little longer. My only regret about you, my boy, is that you did not have children.

LEONARDO: I'm sorry. I just didn't . . .

CATERINA: I know that, my boy. But maybe once or twice -- could it have killed you to sleep with a woman?!

LEONARDO: Mama! And it was going so well.

BLACKOUT

SCENE FIVE

(Enter FRANCESCO, Da Vinci's now grown-up assistant, played by the actor who plays his father in Act I.)

FRANCESCO: (hurrying in) Master? (No reply.) Leonardo! (No reply.) Are you here? (Checks the bed.) Are you dead?

(Enter Leonardo.)

LEONARDO: Not yet.

FRANCESCO: I have something to tell you.

LEONARDO: I have something to tell you.

FRANCESCO: It's not good news.

LEONARDO: Nor is mine, Francesco.

FRANCESCO: Salai is in jail.

LEONARDO: For shoplifting. I know.

FRANCESCO: You know?

LEONARDO: I couldn't tell for sure if it was a bad dream or –

FRANCESCO: It's all true. It's the gossip on every corner of the village.

LEONARDO: The man who arrested him was here. The butcher.

FRANCESCO: In this room?

LEONARDO: Maybe I imagined it. (He goes to the empty easel.)

FRANCESCO: Where's the painting?

LEONARDO: It's gone.

FRANCESCO: I see that. Did you put it away?

LEONARDO: The butcher took it.

FRANCESCO: What?!

LEONARDO: He stole it.

FRANCESCO: Are you sure?

LEONARDO: No. I thought my mother was going to help get it back.

FRANCESCO: (very patient) Sit down, Master.

(Leonardo sits.)

FRANCESCO: Tell me exactly what happened.

LEONARDO: He took my painting. It may have been in exchange for Salai's release from jail. I'm confused.

FRANCESCO: Do not overtax yourself. I will get to the bottom of this.

LEONARDO: He can keep the painting if I can have Salai back.

FRANCESCO: No, he can't. The man who arrested Salai took your painting? Is that it?

LEONARDO: I think so.

FRANCESCO: Maybe we should ask your patron to help.

LEONARDO: I don't want to trouble him. He could throw me out of here.

FRANCESCO: He's not going to throw you out. He admires you tremendously.

LEONARDO: Not if there is scandal. And there is scandal.

FRANCESCO: We must keep cool heads. What is the name of the man who stole the painting?

LEONARDO: Luigi.

FRANCESCO: Luigi? A butcher?

LEONARDO: No, it was Captain . . . something. Captain . . . I can't remember.

FRANCESCO: Do you know where he lives?

LEONARDO: In the village?

FRANCESCO: I will check when I'm done here.

LEONARDO: Do you think they will release poor Salai?

FRANCESCO: All in good time. All in good time.

LEONARDO: Jail cannot be good for him. At heart he is such a sensitive boy.

FRANCESCO: Salai? Yeah, as sensitive as a constipated turd.

LEONARDO: Francesco! I know he has not treated you well all these years. Still, he is almost your brother.

FRANCESCO: I'm sorry, Master. I must not act like Salai. And he is not my brother.

LEONARDO: You have been a good and faithful student every minute you've been here. I am so glad you came to me. Your father would be so proud, Francesco.

FRANCESCO: He worried about my welfare. I told him I would be fine.

LEONARDO: And you were fine, weren't you? I remember!

FRANCESCO: I told my father that nobody can make a teenaged boy do anything he does not want to do. (Smiles.)

LEONARDO: So true.

FRANCESCO: We worked out our living situation just fine.

LEONARDO: As I recall, you took charge immediately.

FRANCESCO: I did. And Salai was not well pleased.

LEONARDO: I will leave you my estate, my boy.

FRANCESCO: Let's not talk about that. That's a long way in the distance.

LEONARDO: I don't think it's that far away.

FRANCESCO: You do not have to leave me anything, Master. I am blessed that I have been in your life.

LEONARDO: If not for yourself, then for me. I need someone to be guardian of my works, my notes. Will you promise that you will look after them?

FRANCESCO: I cannot promise, Master. It is too great a responsibility.

LEONARDO: It would ease a burden on my heart if I knew for sure that you would look after my legacy.

FRANCESCO: I want a legacy of my own, Master. You of all people must know that.

LEONARDO: At least save my drawings.

FRANCESCO: I will do my best.

LEONARDO: And my paintings.

FRANCESCO: If I can.

LEONARDO: My notebooks? If I must say so myself, they're quite good.

FRANCESCO: (with warmth) It's all about you, isn't it, Leonardo Da Vinci?!

LEONARDO: I hate to brag, but your work being with mine can't hurt either one of us.

FRANCESCO: We can deal with all that later. At the moment we need to free Salai – I suppose.

LEONARDO: Oh, yes, Salai. He's been arrested, am I correct?

FRANCESCO: And is stewing in jail. (insincerely) Poor, poor Salai, what will become of him?

(Enter Salai.)

SALAI: Oh, indeed what?! (Bows.)

FRANCESCO: Oh, my God, how did you get out?

SALAI: Let's just say –

ALL THREE: He knows some people!

SALAI: The evidence was rotten to begin with and then got even more rotten. And then disappeared.

FRANCESCO: Those oranges from Florida?

SALAI: Exactly. And I also sucked off the jailer.

FRANCESCO: Of course you did. You're a cocksucker.

SALAI: Contrary to what you may have heard, I have always found cocksuckers to be very, very nice people.

FRANCESCO: And to think we worried about you.

LEONARDO: Welcome home, my boy. I missed you terribly. (Holds open his arms to Salai. They hug.)

FRANCESCO: (faintly disgusted) It's always the prodigal who gets the hugs, isn't it?

SALAI: But it's the goody-goody who gets the estate in the end.

FRANCESCO: Is it? Somehow I doubt it.

LEONARDO: Boys, don't fight! I love you both.

SALAI: Love you much!

FRANCESCO: Oh, for God's sake! "Love you much"! Is that the best you can do?

LEONARDO: Are you out for good, Salai? Will there be a trial?

SALAI: It's a possibility. That Luigi fellow, or whatever his name is, is still gunning for you, Master. And he's the unrelenting type.

LEONARDO: Gunning how? Maybe I could invent a bigger gun?

SALAI: He told me that he won't rest until he shuts down your child exploitation factory.

FRANCESCO: You mean this place?

SALAI: His words, not mine.

FRANCESCO: And did you tell him this is no such place?

SALAI: I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of telling him anything.

FRANCESCO: Maybe if he heard it from you or me, or both of us, he'd let up, get a different perspective – you should pardon the pun.

SALAI: I don't think there's any arguing with some folks. And your pun deserves the death penalty.

LEONARDO: Perhaps I should just die and get all this over with.

SALAI: Now there's an idea!

FRANCESCO: Certainly not!

LEONARDO: There is one thing left to do, though.

SALAI: What's that?

FRANCESCO: I think he means the painting. (Gestures at the easel.)

SALAI: (Looks.) What happened to it?

FRANCESCO: The butcher stole it.

(Enter Butcher.)

BUTCHER: No, he didn't.

LEONARDO: Yes, he did.

BUTCHER: I'm afraid your master has become a bit addled.

FRANCESCO: Why are you here?

BUTCHER: Why are *you* here?

67

FRANCESCO: I live here.

BUTCHER: The perverts' paradise.

SALAI: It's hardly paradise.

FRANCESCO: Have you no respect, sir, for the great Leonardo ? (Nods at Leonardo.)

BUTCHER: I don't think everything is forgiven because he has done a few okay paintings.

FRANCESCO: They're masterpieces! Everyone can see that!

BUTCHER: We'll see. I am more interested in the permanent damage he has done to his pupils, his boy pupils. He has ruined many lives.

FRANCESCO: He has not ruined my life!

SALAI: Well, maybe mine he has.

FRANCESCO: You were ruined before you took one step in here.

BUTCHER: (to Salai) Are you willing to testify against your master in court?

SALAI: Perhaps.

FRANCESCO: (to Salai) You wouldn't!

SALAI: I wouldn't?

BUTCHER: The shoplifting charge could be permanently erased as can the problematic escape from jail.

SALAI: I did not escape. I was let go. And I have a signed document from the jailer to prove it.

BUTCHER: Really? I'd love to see it. Does it say for "services rendered"?

SALAI: Something like that.

BUTCHER: Where is this wondrous document?

SALAI: Around.

FRANCESCO: We can deal with all that later, if need be. Meanwhile, what about the stolen painting?

LEONARDO: This man took it.

BUTCHER: And you took the virtue of these men when they were but lads.

FRANCESCO: You don't know what happened or didn't happen to us.

BUTCHER: My mind will hardly go there, but I can guess.

SALAI: You're an asshole, do you know that?

BUTCHER: And what were you, Salai – weren't you an asshole around here, so to speak?

LEONARDO: I never liked assholes!

BUTCHER: I think the master is a bit confused.

LEONARDO: I'm not confused about that. I liked pretty boys. Not assholes!

BUTCHER: So you admit you like boys?

FRANCESCO: You're trying to make it all seem dirty. Well, it wasn't, and it isn't!

BUTCHER: Something tells me you are trying to make it all so pure and artistic and mutual. And it wasn't, and it isn't!

FRANCESCO: Why don't you mind your own business? You weren't here!

BUTCHER: Somebody's got to protect the innocent.

SALAI: Like me!

LEONARDO: My poor little Salai.

FRANCESCO: Give me a break! Salai was never innocent, even in his mother's womb.

BUTCHER: Perhaps a turn on the rack will help us get to the truth.

SALAI: You'll never get me back to that jail, I'll bet you that.

BUTCHER: I can bring the rack here, if you like.

SALAI: Yeah, and you might wind up on it.

BUTCHER: Oh, I won't come alone. I know people.

FRANCESCO: There will be no rack, either at the jail or here. The French governor is our friend. And when it comes to knowing people, I'll take his friendship over any of yours any day.

BUTCHER: The French governor could be overthrown at any moment, and then we'll see who knows who!

LEONARDO: All I ask is that you bring back my painting. I need to finish it. I think it could be my last one.

69

BUTCHER: I'm afraid it's being held as evidence.

FRANCESCO: So you do have it?!

(Enter Leonardo's mother with the painting.)

CATERINA: No, he doesn't, not anymore.

LEONARDO: Mama!

CATERINA : My baby!

LEONARDO: Is that my painting?

CATERINA: I took it from the jail.

FRANCESCO: (to Leonardo) Who are you speaking to, Master?

SALAI: His mama's ghost.

BUTCHER: I don't see or hear anyone, but I do see the painting hovering over there.

CATERINA: You bet you r hog entrails, butcher boy! And you're not getting it back!

(She waves the painting around.)

BUTCHER: Oh, so now we must add witchcraft to the charges.

SALAI: Go, Mama!

BUTCHER: I'm taking the painting with me.

LEONARDO: No, you're not!

BUTCHER: We'll see about that. (Goes to grab the painting.)

CATERINA: Who are you calling a witch!? (She runs to another part of the studio with the painting.)

BUTCHER: That's evidence and government property!

CATERINA: It's yours if you can get it, butcher boy! (Moves to another place with the painting.)

BUTCHER: Perhaps if I just slice it?! (Takes out a long knife.)

SALAI: Give it to him. (to Butcher) All charges dropped if we give it to you?

BUTCHER: Yes! (Lunges at the painting with the knife but missing.)

FRANCESCO: (taking the painting from Leonardo's mother) Let me help.

70

CATERINA: (tugging on it) I can handle it!

LEONARDO: Mama, don't get stabbed!

CATERINA: You can't stab a ghost.

BUTCHER: I bet she thinks I can't stab a ghost. Well, I have news for her. Your mother doesn't stand a ghost of a chance against me!

SALAI: That's bad. (wrinkling his nose) Bad joke. If you want to hang out with us, your jokes have to be wittier.

BUTCHER: I'll show you a bad joke: the bad, bad butcher boy destroys the last Leonardo and smiles as he does it! (Stabs at the painting and sticks the knife into the frame.) Damn!

FRANCESCO: Let me have the painting!

CATERINA: I can fly higher with it than you can! (She stands on a bench with the painting held over her head.)

BUTCHER: Give me the painting or I will kill your son! (Seizes Leonardo and puts the knife to his throat.)

LEONARDO: Mama!

CATERINA: Leonardo! Fight, my boy, fight!

LEONARDO: I always thought my life would end like most people's, a cruel farce.

(Tableau.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE FIVE

(The next day.)

(Francesco is tidying things up in the studio.)

(Leonardo is asleep in the bed, propped up by pillows.)

(Enter Salai.)

SALAI: What are you doing?

FRANCESCO: Tidying things up.

71

SALAI: No need to. I'll do it.

FRANCESCO: No, you won't.

SALAI: You always say that.

FRANCESCO: And you never do.

(Leonardo stirs in the bed.)

SALAI: You're disturbing him.

FRANCESCO: He was fine until you came in.

SALAI: I think the end might be near. Yesterday was too much for him. So let him rest.

(Leonardo stirs again.)

FRANCESCO: (going to the bedside) Master, are you all right?

LEONARDO: (mumbles something)

FRANCESCO: What's that?

SALAI: He wants some water. I guess you don't understand him as well as I do.

FRANCESCO: I have a jug of water here. (He gives a sip from a goblet of water to Leonardo.)

SALAI: Thanks for your help yesterday.

FRANCESCO: It was nothing.

SALAI: I didn't know how we were going to get out of the situation.

FRANCESCO: Sometimes you just have to take matters into your own hands.

SALAI: I was surprised. You've always been such a goody goody.

FRANCESCO: When it comes to the master, nothing is too much.

SALAI: Do you think some other authorities might come looking for the butcher?

FRANCESCO: Possibly. From what I can discern, it was not very well liked and won't be missed.

SALAI: What if he begins to stink?

FRANCESCO: I put lime on him.

SALAI: Did you? Good for you. Where did you finally put him after you stabbed him?

FRANCESCO: Under the privy. (Points off and down.)

SALAI: I'm sorry I didn't help much.

FRANCESCO: The master's mother helped lug his guts down there.

SALAI: Remarkable woman.

FRANCESCO: She'd do anything for her boy.

SALAI: I'm ashamed that I ran away.

FRANCESCO: I guess you're e a lover, not fighter.

SALAI: I pride myself on my cleverness, my adroitness, and yet . . .

FRANCESCO: Just don't blabbing about what happened to the man.

SALAI: Are we going to Hell for it?

FRANCESCO: No, we saved the painting. And he will rot in the privy.

SALAI: That we did. And the master.

FRANCESCO: At least for a time. He won't die violently, not if I can help it.

SALAI: You're a good man, Francesco Melfi –even if you are a murderer.

FRANCESCO : Why, thank you, Salai. That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me.

SALAI: By the way, where's the painting itself?

FRANCESCO: In a safe place.

SALAI: You're not going to tell me where?

FRANCISCO: No.

SALAI: Why not?

FRANCESCO: Because you'd probably sell it.

SALAI: No, I wouldn't! . . . How much do you think we could get for it?

FRANCESCO: Ten florin.

SALAI: That much?

FRANCESCO: Don't you even go there for a second.

SALAI: I'm not! . . . Ten florin!

FRANCESCO: So that's how you'd repay the master for all he's taught you and done for you?

SALAI: You don't think very highly of me, do you?

FRANCESCO: Why should I? Every thought you've ever had has been about yourself.

SALAI: So are yours! Don't be so holier than thou.

FRANCESCO: At least I pretend occasionally, Salai. At least I pretend sometimes.

(Leonardo stirs in the bed.)

SALAI: Do you think he might die today?

FRANCESCO: It won't be long.

SALAI: I hope he lasts. Isabella d'Este sent a messenger. She wants to come by and pay her last respects.

FRANCESCO: And probably put a paintbrush in his hand and force him to finish that portrait of her.

SALAI: I would not be surprised.

FRANCESCO: She'd better hurry. (Looks back at the bed.)

SALAI: She says that she wants to give him a goodbye present.

FRANCESCO: What could she possibly give him at this stage of his life?

SALAI: I wish I could give him a goodbye present as well.

FRANCESCO: The time to do that was before he became bed-ridden.

SALAI: He's not completely dead yet. He can still sit up at times.

FRANCESCO: I just don't want you or Isabella d'Este overtaxing him. Promise?

SALAI: Promise. (Smiles enigmatically.)

FRANCESCO: What does that smile mean?

SALAI: Nothing. Just a smile, like the one on the painting.

FRANCESCO: Can I trust you, Salai?

FRANCESCO: You can trust us both. Isabella d'Este and I just want some private time with him before he goes.

FRANCESCO: Prayers? He did not believe much in prayers.

SALAI: Just some private time, first her, then me.

FRANCESCO: Are you two up to something? Some new and useless elixir?

SALAI: We will let you have his final moments. He always loved you best. What do you say?

FRANCESCO: All right, Salai, you and the marchessa can have your private time with him.

SALAI: Thank you. (calling) Marchessa, you may come in!

(Enter Isabella grandly.)

ISABELLA: How lovely to be here! Where is the great Leonardo?

SALAI: He's here, milady. (Shows her the bed.)

ISABELLA: (about Francesco) Has he agreed about our private time?

FRANCESCO: He has, madam, he has. I will return after you have said your goodbyes – in an hour or so?

ISABELLA: (to Salai) Is that enough time?

SALAI: If we proceed judiciously.

FRANCESCO: Well then, proceed judiciously. I will leave you to your goodbyes.
(Exits.)

SALAI: Till then. (quickly to Isabella) You first.

ISABELLA: He's not dead, is he?

(Leonardo stirs.)

SALAI: He stirs. And I'd be willing to bet that he's got two left.

ISABELLA: Okay, I'd don't want this to be creepy. Or not too creepy.

SALAI: You're sure your memory lapses are under control?

ISABELLA: Of course.

SALAI: And you're still fertile?

ISABELLA: As a scorpion!

SALAI: Let's hope it works.

ISABELLA: Even though he never finished my portrait, I forgive him and will bear his child with pride!

SALAI: Do you need any help?

ISABELLA: Salai, I know men. They always have room for an orgasm, even close-to-death gay ones.

SALAI: All right, I'll stand over here and keep watch. We don't want Francesco butting in.

(Isabella goes to the bed.)

ISABELLA: Hello, Leonardo. It's me. I have come to give you a farewell gift so that your legacy will go on.

(Leonardo stirs.)

LEONARDO: (groggy) Isabella?

ISABELLA: That's right, dear. (She gets into the bed and pulls the bed curtain closed.)

(The lights dim.)

(The lights return.)

SALAI: (nearing the bed) Isabella, is it done?

ISABELLA: (getting out of the bed.) Yes.

SALAI: How did it go?

ISABELLA: Surprisingly well. Worked like a charm.

SALAI: Now me.

ISABELLA: Don't you think he might need some time to recover?

SALAI: Trust me. I know what I'm doing. (He slurps.)

ISABELLA: Don't gross me out. Goodbye. (She leaves.)

SALAI: Goodbye. I'll tell Francesco you said goodbye. (Salai pulls into the bed and pulls the bed curtain shut.) Leonardo, it's Salai.

(Leonardo stirs.)

LEONARDO: Are you saying goodbye, my boy?

SALAI: In the only way I know how, Master.

76

(The lights dim.)

(The lights come up again.)

(Enter Francesco.)

FRANCESCO: Am I back too soon?

SALAI: No, you're good. The marchessa had to run.

FRANCESCO: Did she? (about Leonardo) He hasn't passed, has he?

(Leonardo grunts happily.)

SALAI: Oh, no, not at all.

FRANCESCO: He sounds better.

SALAI: Oh, he is, he is. And when he goes, I think we can be assured .

FRANCESCO: Assured of what?

SALAI: That he died happy.

BLACKOUT

THE END