

THE NINCOMPOOP

A Play

Paul Calandrino

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CAST

Calandrino	Painter of frescoes, a nincompoop, 36
Monna Tessa	His wife, 28
Bruno	A painter by rote, 48
Buffalmacco “Macco”	A painter whose own beauty surpasses that of his work, 33
Simone	Man of learning, 62
Lauretta	Midwife, possibly a witch, “39”
Apprentice	Assistant to all three painters, 19
Messenger	From Pisa
Musicians	Recorder, mandolin, etc., who play between acts and also serve as various corpses and townspeople

SETTING

Florence, 1350

SET DESIGN NOTE

Sets are comprised mostly of “frescoes,” which can be either projections or flats painted in the style of Florentine frescoes of the era.

Most furnishings should be depicted in the frescoes, though some actual tables, chairs, and beds are required.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

The character of Calandrino appears in four of the 100 stories of Giovanni Boccaccio's great 14th-century work *The Decameron*. In these four tales, Calandrino is shown to be a gullible fool, a brute who beats his wife, a cheat who is beaten by his wife, and a painter of frescoes. He is convinced by his so-called friends, Bruno and Buffalmacco, also fresco painters, that he is pregnant, that he has found magic stones which make him invisible, that he has stolen his own pig, and that a beautiful noblewoman (who is actually a prostitute) is in love with him. Is there any question, then, why I would have chosen this model literary character as the subject of my latest play? Of course.

I have chosen Calandrino, in no small measure, because we share the same name. Though few people have ever heard of him -- a couple of Italian scholars and some of us who share the name -- I felt a need not to reshape history, but to boldly change it. The odd Italian scholar who sees this play will denounce the attempt. He will argue that I got it all wrong. That Boccaccio's Calandrino was based on a historical figure, the painter Nozzo di Perino, believed to have been a simpleton. That the real Calandrino was a true idiot with no redeeming qualities. To him I say, Tell it to your scholar buddies.

I have written this play for my late Sicilian grandfather, Salvatore Calandrino, who owned a copy of *The Decameron* for many years. Throughout my childhood, I heard him boast that Calandrino was a great and important figure, who appeared in a great work of literature written by the greatest Italian author of all times (apparently, he considered Dante a dilettante). In college, I read *The Decameron* finally. The next time I visited my grandparents, I looked for the book in their lone bookcase. I suppose I wanted to poke fun at my grandfather's own gullibility. But the tome was nowhere in evidence. "Grandpa," I said. "Where's *The Decameron*?" "The what?" "*The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio." "Never heard of it," he said and changed the subject. He'd obviously learned the sad truth on his own. The book, like the victim of a mob hit, had disappeared, never to be seen or acknowledged again.

Grandpa, every dog has his day, and if Calandrino was not such an important literary figure in the grand scheme of *The Decameron*, perhaps he will become more of one in these few scenes. This play tries to show that despite being a fool, a man can still feel profound feelings, have great fears and longings, can sometimes peer into the future, be ahead of his time, and imagine things of great beauty. With apologies to Boccaccio.

ACT I. SCENE 1.

(Fresco: A back street of Florence. Predawn. The unattended body of a plague victim lies downstage. Lights rise slowly while a series of titles projects:

*Florence, 1350
The Black Death ravages Europe
The Little Ice Age brings endless winter to the Northern Hemisphere
The Medici have not yet risen to prominence
And the Pope has moved to Provençe
Oh, and ...
Michelangelo won't be conceived for another 125 years*

Bruno and Buffalmacco, "Macco," enter. Bruno is dressed neatly, in clothing a little above his stature. Macco, a younger, handsomer man, is more casual, his shirt open at the throat. Seeing the body, they pull out handkerchiefs, which they hold to their noses between lines.)

BRUNO

I'm telling you, Macco, it's a sign that the Day of Reckoning is at hand. My fingers are about to fall off they're so cold. How can a person be expected to hold a brush under these conditions? There'd better be a fire lit in the count's portico or I'll murder that apprentice.

MACCO

A sign.

BRUNO

Yes, a sign. You don't believe me, but you'll see.

MACCO

My grandmother says she remembers several unusually cold winters in a row when she was a child.

BRUNO

But this is summer. And how many years has it been now? No, the Devil -- no, our Merciful Father Himself -- is out to get us.

MACCO

I'd be more convinced by a rain of frogs.

BRUNO

(Waving his handkerchief toward the corpse.)

What about a plague? Would that convince you? Think about it. What has mankind not achieved ... in art, medicine, commerce? The cycle is complete. The modern world can end.

MACCO

Then I'll sail to the old world, to Africa, where the sun is still warm ... and the women dress appropriately.

BRUNO

And the buboes are just as full of blood and pus.

(A Messenger enters. He sees the body but ignores it. He stands before a door and consults a piece of paper in his hands.)

BRUNO (cont'd)

What? Who's this?

MESSENGER

Gentlemen.

BRUNO

Keep your distance from us, sir.

MESSENGER

I intend to. Do you know if this is the home of the one known as Calandrino, master painter of frescoes?

BRUNO

Who?

MESSENGER

Calandrino, master painter --

BRUNO

No, I heard you. I know of Calandrino. Sure, he's well known in this corner of Florence. But not for his painting.

MESSENGER

No?

BRUNO

No. He's known for his ... Macco, how would you put it?

MACCO

His innocence?

BRUNO

Is that really the right word?

MACCO

His naiveté? Guilelessness? (*Bruno waits.*) His stupidity?

BRUNO

That's it. (*To Messenger.*) His stupidity.

MACCO

And gullibility.

MESSENGER

He's well-known for this?

BRUNO

Renowned.

MESSENGER

But not for his painting?

MACCO

Who knows? He might eventually. Every dog has his day.

BRUNO

I doubt that this particular dog will.

MESSENGER

Why is that?

BRUNO

Sir, this is a man who once believed he'd found magic stones that made him invisible. He beat his wife when she saw him plainly and told him so. He thought she'd broken the spell.

MACCO

Yes, that's true. Another time he was convinced that a gorgeous young noblewoman, who was actually a prostitute, was tragically in love with him. His wife pummeled him when she found them together. His bruises were visible for weeks.

(Bruno and Macco laugh. The Messenger regards them dubiously.)

MESSENGER

I see. Is this where he lives?

MACCO

Y --

BRUNO

We don't know where he lives.

MACCO

But --

(Bruno pulls Macco away by the arm.)

BRUNO

Sorry we couldn't help.

(They hide in a dark alcove.)

MACCO

What are you doing? That's Calandrino's house. We're here to get him.

BRUNO

We always have to roust him out of bed. And then he, or his wife --

MACCO

Ah, Tessa.

BRUNO

... shouts obscenities at us. Let someone else do the dirty work for once. Besides, I'm curious. That fellow isn't from around here.

MACCO

Milan, I'd say, from the style of his clothes.

BRUNO

What, you're an expert on fashion all of a sudden? Listen and learn.

(The messenger pounds on the door. No response. He pounds again. The second floor shutters open and Calandrino, unshaven, bulky, almost frightening, leans out. His night shirt is open.)

CALANDRINO

Bruno, Macco, is that you? (*Seeing the Messenger.*) Oh.

MESSENGER

Are you the one known as Calandrino ... uh ... painter of frescoes?

TESSA

(*Offstage.*)

Who wants to know?

CALANDRINO

Who wants to know?

MESSENGER

(*Sarcastic.*)

The pope.

CALANDRINO

Really? The pope? What does he want with ... Calandrino?

MESSENGER

His Holiness wants to consult with him on the proper wine to serve with capon.

CALANDRINO

(*Puzzled.*)

Capon? Well, I think that's usually served with --

MESSENGER

I'm pulling your leg! The pope did not send me.

CALANDRINO

Oh. Who did?

MESSENGER

No living man, I assure you.

CALANDRINO

(*Ponders, then brightens.*)

I get it. A woman sent you.

MESSENGER

No living woman either.

CALANDRINO

Is it a ghost who wants this Calandrino, painter of frescoes?

TESSA

(Offstage.)

Master painter of frescoes.

CALANDRINO

Master painter of frescoes.

MESSENGER

Maybe. If you believe in such things. Most people do.

CALANDRINO

Don't you believe in ghosts?

MESSENGER

What I believe in is the legal document. I have in my possession certain words placed on this parchment by a lawyer at the behest of one Madonna Ottavia di Pisa, deceased.

CALANDRINO

Deceased? Since when?

MESSENGER

Some five or six days ago. I am sent to discharge parts of her will.

CALANDRINO

You've discovered your man. I'm Calandrino.

MESSENGER

And a grisly discovery it is.

CALANDRINO

The woman you speak of was my aunt. A great aunt, or something, several times removed.

MESSENGER

Yes, well, she's been removed permanently.

CALANDRINO

And she has ... written something to me? Perhaps, left a gift?

MESSENGER

Your grief is touching. Don't you want to know what she died of?

CALANDRINO

I can tell you that. *(Motioning to the corpse.)* It's what everyone dies of these days.

MESSENGER

Old age?

CALANDRINO

No. Really? Old age?

MESSENGER

One of the lucky ones.

TESSA

(Offstage.)

Husband, I'm waiting.

CALANDRINO

So how much did she leave me?

MESSENGER

Enough not to shout it aloud ... in this neighborhood.

(Tessa appears in her nightgown, hair disheveled, radiant with lust. She tries to pull Calandrino in.)

TESSA

What does he want? Send him away. I need you inside.

CALANDRINO

Not now, Tessa. *(To Messenger.)* You have it with you?

MESSENGER

(Pretending to search for it.)

Let me see. Not in this pocket. Not in ... *Yes*, I have it! Do you think I'd come all the way from Pisa without it?

CALANDRINO

I'll be right down!

TESSA

No! You can't leave yet. You haven't ... you know.

CALANDRINO

I'll be right back! My dear deceased aunt has left me an inheritance!

(Exits.)

TESSA

You had better not leave for work before you ...

(Exits.)

MACCO

Oh, that Tessa. I don't know how Calandrino rates.

BRUNO

What makes you think *you* rate? The important thing here is Calandrino's inheritance. We have to get some of it before he spends it all.

MACCO

How much could it be? Calandrino's no prince.

BRUNO

If it's a single brass coin, we're entitled to part of it.

MACCO

How do you figure?

BRUNO

We're his friends!

(They look at each other, then laugh. Calandrino opens the door and enters the street.)

CALANDRINO

Give it to me.

MESSENGER

Not so fast. *(Holds out the paper, a quill, and ink.)* Your mark.

CALANDRINO

My mark? *(Sarcastic.)* Wait right here, I'll get the official seal. I have no mark. I'm a painter.

MESSENGER

Then paint.

(Calandrino takes the paper and quill. He dips the quill and draws hastily, dips again and draws some more. He hands the paper back.)

MESSENGER

My God, sir. It's the Madonna and Child. How did you --?

CALANDRINO

You have something for me?

TESSA

(Offstage.)

Husband. Why do you keep me waiting?

MESSENGER

(Handing over a leather pouch.)

Two hundred lire.

BRUNO

That'll do! We dine large tonight!

CALANDRINO

Do you mean florins?

MESSENGER

If I'd meant florins, I might not have found my way to Florence.

CALANDRINO

(Earnestly.)

Why is that?

MESSENGER

Don't spend it all in one place. *(Calandrino turns to go inside.)* Sir?

CALANDRINO

What?

MESSENGER

In Pisa, it is customary to offer the bringer of good tidings a small token.

CALANDRINO

What a nice custom.

(He shuts the door. The Messenger exits. Bruno and Macco come out of hiding.)

BRUNO

Two hundred lire. We'll have a feast. We'll buy minerals for paint and gold leaf. We could take a trip.

MACCO

Um, have you forgotten? That's Calandrino's money, not ours.

BRUNO

We just need a plan.

(Pause.)

MACCO

Yes?

BRUNO

We'll think of one. Right now we need to get to the count's. Those murals won't paint themselves.

(They go to Calandrino's door. Bruno pounds.)

BRUNO

Calandrino!

MACCO

A day's work awaits!

(Tessa comes to the window seething.)

TESSA

Go away!

MACCO

Good morning, Monna Tessa. You look radiant as usual.

TESSA

Will you shut up and just move on?

BRUNO

But Monna Tessa, the count awaits us. We all have our day's work, our *giornate*.

TESSA

Calandrino's *giornata* begins in this room. So get the hell out, and he'll come by and by.

MACCO

I don't doubt that. *(She slams the shutters.)* Oh, Tessa.

BRUNO

Shut up. I don't know who's more of a menace, her or Calandrino. Or you! We will get our feast, and we'll make him pay more than mere currency for it. You mark my words.

(They exit. Fade.)

ACT I. SCENE 2.

(Fresco: Calandrino's bedroom. An hour later. In the dark, we hear Tessa's shout of ecstasy. The lights rise. Tessa is sprawled on the bed, tangled in the sheets, spent. She props her legs on the headboard as Calandrino dresses hurriedly.)

CALANDRINO

I know exactly what I want to do with this money. It's always been my dream to own a farm. It doesn't have to be much. A few hundred hectares with a few hundred head of sheep, goats, cattle, chickens, geese. We'll grow grains, vegetables, herbs, flowers.

TESSA

And with the change you can buy the Ponte Vecchio.

CALANDRINO

Why would I want to buy a bridge?

TESSA

Husband, it's only two hundred lire. You might be able to afford a shack and a one-eyed goat.

CALANDRINO

Don't you want to leave this rats' nest behind? Move to the country and get away from all this dying?

TESSA

The dying will follow us anywhere we go.

CALANDRINO

But our chances will be a lot better if we cut ourselves off from everyone else in the world. Try to imagine, a villa among the vineyards, a little stream running nearby where the lambs bleat in the setting sun.

TESSA

I don't want to be cut off. And you're no farmer. You're a painter.

CALANDRINO

Painter! Giotto was a painter. I'm an applier of pigments.

TESSA

You could be as great as Giotto. Greater!

CALANDRINO

No! There is none greater and there never will be. If I had a fifth of the master's talent, the pope himself would be my patron. No, I paint frescoes because frescoes are made of rock. A rock is something I understand. It's stubborn. It wants to stay a rock, and so you have to crush it, grind it to powder, and imprison it in lime. I'm not a painter. I am one who knows how to make stones behave. And that's why I should be a farmer!

TESSA

You always sell yourself short. I wouldn't have married you if I thought all you could do was tame rocks.

CALANDRINO

I have no discipline as a painter. Bruno and Buffalmacco --

TESSA

Are fakes, amateurs.

CALANDRINO

Then why do they get all the work? Why am I always working for them and not the bishops and merchants themselves?

TESSA

(Knows the answer but can only sigh. She pulls the sheet around her and rises. She goes to him and takes his hand.)

Husband, your time will come. You have it in you to be great. You have passion and instinct. There are cycles and cycles of brilliant ... *(He scoffs at the word.)* Yes, brilliant frescoes in these hands, and in this heart ... if not in this head.

CALANDRINO

(Pulls away.)

Not in this head. That much I know. My time will not come. I have no time. Do you know why? Because a real painter has ideas ... about politics, about the Church, about art itself. And I have none. They want me to paint the Prodigal, I paint the Prodigal. They want me to paint a fig, I paint a fig. It's all the same to me. Is either a symbol? Does either signify something lofty? I wouldn't know. I don't care! At least as a farmer, I could respect myself. No one expects a farmer to have any thoughts at all.

TESSA

You're not a farmer. I wish you would stop saying that! On a farm we would starve. Like it or not, the only way you can provide for me and our family is through painting.

CALANDRINO

(Cautiously.)

Are you pregnant?

TESSA

I could be.

(Lauretta calls from downstairs.)

LAURETTA

Tessa? Tessa did you do it this morning? Once or twice? Twice would be better ...

(She enters, a young woman no longer, but vivacious. She takes off a shawl and several other items of warm clothing. Throughout the scene she lights incense and candles, waves sprigs of herbs around the bed.)

LAURETTA (cont'd)

But I'll live with once. Today is a good day, the feast of St. Mary Magdalene. *There* was a woman who knew something about doing it. Also on this day, the Greeks were known to toss a pregnant sow into a pit, there to ferment and bring forth abundance. Why are you standing? Lie down.

(Tessa obeys. Lauretta puts pillows under Tessa's knees. To Calandrino.)

If you're not going to work today, don't just stand there, be productive. Did you do it once or twice this morning? Can you go again? Of course, you can.

CALANDRINO

(Puts on his jacket.)

I have business.

LAURETTA

It's God's commandment that we be fruitful and multiply. Don't forget that. If you want to achieve immortality on earth, you must bear offspring. Don't be bashful. I'll turn my back.

CALANDRINO

I'll be home after dark.

TESSA

Don't you tell those two parasites about that money.

(He exits.)

LAURETTA

(Calls after him.)

And don't go near that corpse in the street. Tell the priest to send someone with a cart.

(She waves a censer by its chain, dispensing smoke into the corners of the room.)

How was he? Did you climax?

TESSA

Yes.

LAURETTA

Not too hard, I hope. Too hard is no good. It shuts you down. Pushes everything out.

TESSA

I can't help myself, Lauretta.

LAURETTA

Were you above or below?

TESSA

Um ...

LAURETTA

I've told you! On all fours or flat on your back! None of this horsy riding!

TESSA

(Rising up on her elbows.)

But I love it. It's so ...

LAURETTA

No. That's something I won't compromise on. Lie back down.

(She feels Tessa's forehead and the pulses at her wrists and ankles.)

LAURETTA (cont'd)

Now, what kind of business is he off to? What money?

TESSA

An aunt of his died and left him a gift. He wants to buy a farm.

LAURETTA

How much?

TESSA

Two hundred lira.

LAURETTA

Ha! Some farm. He'll have to raise very small animals. Mice maybe.

TESSA

Can you tell anything? Am I? (*Lauretta shrugs.*) Maybe it's too soon?

LAURETTA

It's been two years.

TESSA

We do it every day. Sometimes two or three times.

LAURETTA

Don't try so hard. Do it, yes. As many times as you like. But don't want it so badly. God doesn't like it when he thinks you're making demands of Him. (*Strokes Tessa's hair.*) Don't worry, you'll have another. It could be grief, too. It's not good to grieve so long. Grief, anxiety, stress ... all of these are impediments, obstructions. The river won't flow unless you clear it of debris, log jams, bloated corpses.

TESSA

Lauretta!

LAURETTA

I'm just telling you the truth. You lost a child and you have grieved. Now you must let go and move on. It's the only way. (*Tessa sulks.*) Now, tell me. Did that beautiful hunk of a man drop by this morning?

TESSA

Which hunk?

LAURETTA

You know who I mean. Buffalmacco! Oh, that jaw, those thighs!

TESSA

Cast a spell if you're so anxious to couple with the man.

LAURETTA

Oh, I have. Believe me, I have! (*Advances playfully upon Tessa.*) Oh, Macco, my love. Kiss me, take me!

TESSA

(Fending her off.)

Stop it! Leave me alone!

(They both laugh. Blackout.)

ACT I. SCENE 3.

(Fresco: The count's portico. There are three distinct fresco panels. The top portion of all three panels is painted, depicting sky and clouds, the tops of hills, perhaps a castle in one of the panels, woods in another, and the farthest edge of a hunting ground in the third. [See end note.] Before each panel is a low platform, so the painters can reach the top of the painting. Downstage is a workbench strewn with ceramic bowls, bags of crushed minerals, brushes, trowels, and water jugs. Bruno and Macco are on the platforms, painting at the first two panels. They have finished outlining what they will paint this day and are now filling in the shapes. The Apprentice, young and eager to please, is at the third panel studying the painted figures of courtiers seated in the grass.)

MACCO

I just don't know if he'll fall for it.

BRUNO

What do you mean? This is the man whom we convinced had stolen his own pig.

MACCO

(Laughs.)

We got him on that one.

BRUNO

He'll believe anything we tell him. He'll believe this. Especially when we get Master Simone on board. *(To the Apprentice.)* You. What are you staring at? I need pigment.

APPRENTICE

How does he do it?

BRUNO

How does who do what?

APPRENTICE

Master Calandrino. These figures in the gallery. They're just observing the hunt, not even the principal figures, yet their faces are ... remarkable. They say so much! Their boredom is merely a mask. You can almost smell the blood, the excitement, and Master Calandrino hasn't even painted the hunt yet!

BRUNO

Master Calandrino has no discipline! That's why his figures inspire revulsion. I need amatito! I'll have it now or you're out on the street.

(The Apprentice goes to the bench and exchanges bowls with Bruno.)

What do you expect from a man who grew up drawing from life? As a child he sketched barnyard animals on rocks. It's disgusting. Yes, a native talent, but an uncultivated mind.

MACCO

His skull is solid. Bone through and through.

BRUNO

Do you remember, Macco, how at the academy Calandrino could never paint the holy figures right? His Christ on the crucifix actually looked to be in pain.

MACCO

It was painful to behold.

BRUNO

There were beads of sweat glossing the Savior's forehead and cheekbones.

MACCO

A rebel.

BRUNO

No, a rebel knows what he's rebelling against. Calandrino has no clue.

APPRENTICE

Master, don't we want our paintings to inspire awe?

BRUNO

Awe?! Awe? The purpose of art, of any work of art, is to inspire calm! Beauty, serenity, contentment.

APPRENTICE

Even as the lifeblood drains from our Lord's wounds?

BRUNO

Yes, even so. The more so. The tradition teaches us this, and the tradition is very old and wise.

APPRENTICE

But Giotto --

BRUNO

I don't want to hear about Giotto! Now there was a rebel. Yes, he had his day in the sun, but trust me, a hundred years from now, his and Calandrino's paintings will be regarded, if at all, as aberrations, second-rate, trivial, and they will be scraped off in disgust --

MACCO

Speak of the devil.

(Calandrino enters, goes straight to his panel and stares up at the same group of figures the Apprentice studied.)

BRUNO

Ah, Calandrino. We were just speaking of your mural. Our apprentice was admiring its ... its ...

(Calandrino growls and waves Bruno off.)

MACCO

The morning is almost gone, friend, and you haven't laid your plaster yet.

APPRENTICE

Master, I wish you'd let me lay your *intonaco*. That's the least I could do, if you won't let me grind your pigments.

BRUNO

How can you expect to keep up when you arrive so late? Where have you been?

CALANDRINO

Don't ask.

MACCO

Trouble with the signora?

CALANDRINO

No! But if you insist on hounding me, I've been to see land brokers. Idiots, all of them.

BRUNO

Land brokers? What do you need a land broker for? Don't tell me you've come into some money, because I won't believe it. We're all starving artists here. *Have* you come into some money?

CALANDRINO

(Thinks.)

No.

BRUNO

I didn't think so. If you'd told me that a rich aunt from Pisa had died five days ago and left you two hundred lire, I'd have laughed. *(Laughs.)* I'm laughing now at the thought.

CALANDRINO

(Laughing nervously. Fussing with tools on the bench.)

Yes, that would be hard to believe, wouldn't it. No, we've saved some up. Now I want to buy a farm. But the brokers won't sell anything to me.

BRUNO

The scoundrels. An artist isn't good enough to sell land to. It's not like you were walking in there with a mere two hundred lire and demanding to buy some estate. Who would be that stupid!

CALANDRINO

Yes. Who.

(Calandrino grabs a pointed trowel and climbs his platform. He glares a moment at the fresco, then cuts a deep "X" into the dry plaster. He chips a hunk of plaster off the wall.)

APPRENTICE

Master! Master, what are you doing? Stop! Don't do that! Please don't!

(He hops the platform and grabs Calandrino's arm. Calandrino jerks his arm free and points at the figures in the painting.)

CALANDRINO

Look here. And here. What do you see?

APPRENTICE

Well, first I see ... a dullness in their eyes, a flatness of spirit, born of privilege.

CALANDRINO

Yes.

APPRENTICE

Then I hear the approaching thunder of horse hooves, anticipation, dizziness, despite their desire to remain aloof.

CALANDRINO

And?

APPRENTICE

Isn't that enough?

CALANDRINO

Do you see any fear?

APPRENTICE

(Examining.)

Um ...

CALANDRINO

There is fear in everyone. In kings, in dogs, in children, in deer. No living creature is without it. Every face must have it. It's no good. This has to be redone.

(Calandrino is about to scrape more off, but the Apprentice grabs the trowel out of his hands. A momentary standoff.)

APPRENTICE

Please, Master. Grind your pigments. I'll do it. How much?

(Calandrino points. The Apprentice scrapes, while Calandrino goes to the workbench. Bruno and Macco nod at each other. Bruno goes to Calandrino.)

BRUNO

Calandrino, my friend. Look at you.

CALANDRINO

I'm busy.

BRUNO

No, I mean it. Do you feel well?

CALANDRINO

Why wouldn't I?

BRUNO

Well, the way you're behaving. And you look so ...

CALANDRINO

How do I look?

BRUNO

Nothing, nothing. Probably just a touch of the ...

CALANDRINO

Of the what?

BRUNO

Do you feel a bit warm?

CALANDRINO

Warm? *(Starting to worry, feels his own forehead and neck.)* Now that you mention it.

BRUNO

Don't alarm yourself.

CALANDRINO

No?

BRUNO

How's your strength? This bucket of lime. Does it feel heavy?

CALANDRINO

(Lifting the bucket.)

Seems like a ton.

BRUNO

Don't worry yourself.

(Bruno goes back to his platform. Macco climbs down and walks by Calandrino.)

MACCO

Nature calls. *(Turns back to Calandrino.)* Calandrino, you look like death warmed over. What's wrong?

CALANDRINO

That's what Bruno was just saying. Am I pale?

MACCO

Pale?! Your skin is as white as baby Ganymede's buttocks.

(Calandrino sits. The Apprentice climbs down.)

CALANDRINO

Oh. That's funny you should say so. You know, I've felt queasy all morning.

MACCO

Is there some sort of ... taste in your mouth?

CALANDRINO

Why, yes. Yes, there is.

MACCO

Uh-oh. Worse than I thought.

CALANDRINO

What? What is it? Plague?

MACCO

I wouldn't say plague. *(To Bruno, who joins them.)* Would you say plague?

BRUNO

I wouldn't ... *say* it.

CALANDRINO

Oh! Oh, no. Do you think it could be? Tessa would never let me hear the end of it if I died.

BRUNO

Let's not go overboard here. We need an expert opinion. What you've got might be easily cured.

MACCO

Who could we get?

BRUNO

How about Master Simone?

CALANDRINO

Master Simone, he's a good man. Do you think he can cure me?

BRUNO

It's hard to say. It might take medicine and spells, and maybe more than that.

MACCO

Offerings.

CALANDRINO

Whatever it takes, I'll do it! I can't die! I'm too afraid.

BRUNO

Then you should go home immediately and get into bed. Cover yourself completely, stay calm, don't say a word, don't move a muscle. And as soon as you're settled, send a sample of your water to Master Simone. Hopefully, we've caught this thing in time.

CALANDRINO

I'm too young to die, and yet I feel death's shroud darkening the world around me. Oh, help me. Help me home.

(Bruno motions to the Apprentice, who helps Calandrino to his feet. They exit together, Calandrino hobbling and leaning on the Apprentice. When they are off, Bruno looks at Macco.)

MACCO

Yes, yes, you're right. It's just too easy.

(Fade.)

ACT I. SCENE 4.

(Fresco: Master Simone's rooms. Shelves line the walls and are filled with scrolls, curios, art objects, roots, bones, etc. In a corner hangs a skeleton. Simone, white-haired and intent, sits at a table adding ingredients to a small crucible hung over a flame. A knock at the door. Simone is too absorbed by his work to notice. Louder knocking.)

BRUNO

(Offstage.)

Master Simone! Master Simone, open up!

(The knocking ceases. The door opens tentatively. Bruno's head peers in.)

Master Simone, you haven't expired, have you? *(Goes to him.)* Turning lead into gold, are we? Wood ash into diamonds?

SIMONE

(Focused on his project.)

Ever heard of a Frenchman named Gerbert d'Aurillac?

BRUNO

No.

SIMONE

He dabbled in alchemy. He was a scholar, a renowned master of the Four Ways. Oh, and he changed his name to Silvester the Second when he became pope! (Finally looking at Bruno.) You shouldn't be so dismissive of the natural sciences. In Bologna -- where I undertook my studies and am still regarded with great esteem -- it's believed that all problems, great and small, will one day be solved through science.

BRUNO

Ah, then you have succeeded in distilling rubies from the eyes of bats?

(Simone dips a spoon into the crucible and tastes the steaming brew.)

SIMONE

No, but I have distilled a fabulous soup out of some turnips. Want some?

BRUNO

We have no time. A man may be dying.

SIMONE

Call a priest.

BRUNO

But he might be cured.

SIMONE

What's wrong with him?

BRUNO

He's an idiot.

SIMONE

Not a fatal condition, I assure you. To the contrary, why would so many of suspect intelligence thrive ... unless it were of some advantage to be feeble-minded?

BRUNO

Yes, the subject of your scholarship. But you're wrong. The dolts, the naïfs, the shit-for-brainses serve no purpose whatsoever. Granted, dimwits are plentiful, but it is in society's best interest to either reform, suppress, or put them to shame. Look, I'm offering you an opportunity to advance your research. What I have in mind will test the very limits of human gullibility. And ... there's a payday in it.

SIMONE

(Standing.)

How dare you suggest that my research, my very curiosity, would be for sale! How much?

BRUNO

Two hundred lire, split three ways.

SIMONE

And if your test fails? *(Bruno shrugs.)* One third of nothing is not much.

BRUNO

I aim to get for us a feast of princely proportions.

SIMONE

Nothing doing.

(The Apprentice enters breathlessly carrying a small bowl.)

APPRENTICE

I have the master's water!

SIMONE

What master?

APPRENTICE

Master Calandrino.

SIMONE

Calandrino?! *(To Bruno.)* Why didn't you say so?

BRUNO

You didn't give me the chance.

(Simone takes the bowl from the apprentice and sniffs it once. He takes it to the door and tosses its contents into the street.)

APPRENTICE

Can you tell what's wrong?

SIMONE

(Handing the bowl back. Donning his robes.)

No, and no amount of urine will help me. Not since Adam himself strolled the Garden has there been a man of simpler mind. He has the intelligence of a newborn kitten, blind and mewling and helpless. Yet on the whole he is not so simple. As a painter he has no equal among his contemporaries. Sorry, Bruno, it's true. You are a craftsman of serviceable quality, but Calandrino is, in matters of hue and composition, a genius. And so the question arises: What the hell is God up to? How can a man be blessed with so few brains and such rare talent? What lesson can we learn?

BRUNO

What lesson can we teach! That's what you should be asking.

SIMONE

Your plan will serve both inquiries?

BRUNO

You be the judge.

SIMONE

Tell me on the way. We've no time to lose.

(They exit. Blackout.)

ACT I. SCENE 5.

(Fresco: Calandrino's bedroom. Calandrino lies in bed clutching the covers to his chin. He moans while Tessa, Lauretta, and Macco stand by the bed.)

TESSA

You were fine this morning. You're just upset because no one would sell you a palace for a pittance.

CALANDRINO

Woman, you'll be sorry when I'm gone.

TESSA

I'm sorry when you're here. How will that be any different?

Where does it hurt?

LAURETTA

Everywhere!

CALANDRINO

Your head?

LAURETTA

Yes.

CALANDRINO

Feet?

LAURETTA

Yes.

CALANDRINO

Stomach? Rear? Chest? Fingernails? Elbows?

LAURETTA

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! *Everywhere!*

CALANDRINO

Dementia.

(*To Tessa.*)

LAURETTA

Monna Tessa, may I speak with you?

MACCO

(*Pulls Tessa away from the bed.*)

TESSA

Do I have a choice?

MACCO

This may not be the appropriate time to say this, but you know how much we all admire your husband and his talents. Many times his innovations have salvaged an otherwise doomed project and we have grown to love him as a brother.

TESSA

And from the other side of your mouth?

MACCO

Please, Tessa, I mean this. Whatever the outcome is here, whether my beloved colleague lives or dies, I want you to know that you can always rely on me personally. I am at your service, day or night. If you were, God forbid, to be widowed, I would consider it a great honor if you would take me as your servant and provider.

TESSA

I think I know what you'd like to provide.

(Lauretta joins them.)

LAURETTA

What are you two gossiping about?

TESSA

The signore was just offering his charity.

(She goes to Calandrino. Macco wants to follow, but Lauretta grabs him.)

LAURETTA

You're a true friend.

MACCO

Thank you.

LAURETTA

You are a man of compassion.

MACCO

Yes. Unhand me, would you?

LAURETTA

(Hanging on.)

It surprises me that a man of such compassion and goodness as yourself is -- how to put it? -- unwed. There are so many available ladies these days. All those young widows. And the ones, oh, like myself, just waiting for the perfect man.

MACCO

There are plenty of widowers as well, madam.

LAURETTA

And the *virgins*, who -- *like myself* -- though no spring buds, are nevertheless ripe and plump, and all the juicier for their age!

(He pulls away.)

BRUNO

(Offstage.)

Hello! Are we too late? Please tell us we have arrived in time!

(Enters with Simone and the Apprentice. They stand by the bed. Simone carries a physicians' bag.)

CALANDRINO

Master Simone, at last! Did you receive my water?

SIMONE

Ha! Yes. Calandrino, always playing a joke. That could not have been yours. Confess, now. Was it your wife's? Or this lovely lady's? *(Indicating Lauretta.)* Trying to pull one over on me, are you?

CALANDRINO

No, master, I swear it was my own. *(To Apprentice.)* You saw me give it.

APPRENTICE

I did. It was his own.

SIMONE

(Suddenly grave.)

I see. Curious. Astounding!

CALANDRINO

What? Am I dying? I can't die.

BRUNO

Oh, you can, believe me.

CALANDRINO

I have too much to live for. My farm, my work, my wife, our family to be!

SIMONE

There'll be no talk of dying today. To the contrary, if my preliminary assessment is correct, you may have much to live for. Let's have a look.

(He opens his bag and withdraws a few instruments which he uses to examine Calandrino's throat, ears, eyes. He hums and mumbles through this. He takes out a listening device and applies it to Calandrino's heart and stomach.)

SIMONE (cont'd)

Turn around, please. (*Listens to Calandrino's lungs.*) Cough. Again. Again. Once more. Again. Mm-hmm. (*He palpates Calandrino's legs and feet.*) Mm-hmm. Yes. (*Puts the instruments back in his bag.*) Just as I thought.

CALANDRINO

Plague?

SIMONE

(*Chuckling.*)

No.

BRUNO

Devil's Fire?

SIMONE

No.

MACCO

Saints' Fire?

SIMONE

Uh-uh.

APPRENTICE

Leprosy?

SIMONE

Please.

CALANDRINO

Ague? Is it ague?

SIMONE

Look here, Calandrino. I've examined you from top to bottom and I see nothing wrong ... per se. You're a healthy man.

CALANDRINO

Then why am I so pale? Why do I ache all over?

BRUNO

Yes, why is his stomach so distended?

MACCO

And why does he reek?

TESSA

What do you mean by "per se"?

SIMONE

Speaking strictly as a friend now, Calandrino ... (*Extends his hand.*) Congratulations!
You're pregnant!

(Calandrino screams.)

TESSA

Stop it! You are not pregnant!

LAURETTA

What do you mean he's pregnant? He's a he. He can't be pregnant!

CALANDRINO

Oh, no, no, no!

SIMONE

It is well documented in the animal kingdom; males of countless species are able to give birth. Seahorses, for example.

BRUNO

But we are not animals, doctor. We're human beings. Offspring of the Omnipotent.

SIMONE

(To Lauletta.)

I'm surprised that a woman of your profession hasn't seen this before.

LAURETTA

Seen what?

SIMONE

Don't pretend you don't know. If all is *natural* during ... connubial union, the results are always *natural*. However, if husband and wife play around, defy God's intended ... relationships, then the results are ... unpredictable. Calandrino, Tessa, have your relations been ... *natural*?

(Lauletta gasps.)

TESSA

(Defiant.)

I have no idea what you mean!

MACCO

Monna Tessa, you know. *(Making awkward hand gestures.)* Man, woman. Woman, man.

CALANDRINO

(Bolting to his feet.)

Ahhhh! Tessa, this is your fault! You always want to be on top. I knew we were asking for trouble!

(Everyone stares at her. She can only shake her head and exit. Lauretta follows.)

CALANDRINO

Master, please, make it go away! I beg you! Do something!

SIMONE

I was under the impression that you wanted a family.

CALANDRINO

Not this way! She wants a family. Let *her* have the baby!

BRUNO

Speaking of the birth, doctor, where will the baby come out?

(They all look at one another.)

MACCO

Not his ...

CALANDRINO

(Clasps both hands over his privates and wails. He lifts his shirt and regards his stomach in horror.)

This can't be! This can't be!

(He runs from the room.)

APPRENTICE

(Following.)

Master Calandrino!

(Calandrino's screams and the Apprentice's calls can be heard offstage as they descend the stairs, leave the house,

and run down the street. The men laugh. Tessa and Lauretta enter. The men compose themselves.)

TESSA

(Furious.)

Listen, you three. I don't know what you hope to get out of this, but I promise you, if you don't tell him the truth I'll scratch your eyes out, every last one! *(She lunges at Bruno. Lauretta holds her back.)* I'll chop your balls off and serve them on pasta to the pigs!!!

BRUNO

Tessa, please! Have some respect, if not for me, then for the master.

TESSA

How dare you! How dare you take advantage of that pitiful man!

MACCO

We'll go get him. Don't worry.

BRUNO

There is a cure. *(To Simone.)* Isn't that right?

SIMONE

We hope so.

TESSA

Go get my husband and bring him back! You tell him he's not pregnant! If I tell him, he won't believe me. He respects you three, God help him. I don't know why, but he does. You should be ashamed of yourselves.

SIMONE

(Listing toward remorse.)

Monna Tessa, please ...

BRUNO

(In warning.)

Simone. *(To Tessa.)* We will retrieve him. If there is a cure for what ails your husband, we shall administer it. But ... as you should know ... he is a very difficult case.

(Tessa lunges again, but Lauretta holds tight. The three men exit. Blackout.)

END OF ACT I

(Brief musical interlude. No intermission.)

ACT II. SCENE 1.

(Fresco: Church nave and altar. Scaffolding -- painted into the fresco -- rises out of sight on one side of the nave. A woman dressed in black prays the rosary beside the corpse of a loved one covered in a gauze shroud. She pays little attention to Calandrino, who enters screaming, still with his shirt lifted.)

CALANDRINO

(To the altar, haltingly.)

Oh, Heavenly Father, have mercy! Why? Why me? I can't believe this! First you assault us with plague. Then you dim the sun's warmth beam by beam. You take our first child from us. And now this?!? Surely, we don't deserve it. Look at me. My belly is swelling as we speak. *(Looking up at the ceiling.)* Not that *you're* saying much! Where is your compassion? I can't have this child. I'll split like an overripe melon. Or they'll slice me open and I'll bleed to death. Oh, conception! Needless, errant conception!

(He falls to the ground and wails. The Apprentice runs on.)

APPRENTICE

Dear master, I found you!

CALANDRINO

Leave me alone!

APPRENTICE

I've come to help.

CALANDRINO

There's nothing you can do.

(Rises and steps toward the scaffolding.)

There's nothing anyone can do! I'd climb this scaffolding right now and throw myself off if I weren't so afraid of botching the job and ending up paralyzed from the neck down.

APPRENTICE

Don't say that, master. You'll get through this.

CALANDRINO

How? Please, tell me.

APPRENTICE

I don't know. *(Calandrino wails.)* No, really. I think we need a second opinion. Maybe you're not pregnant. Maybe it's just a tumor.

CALANDRINO

Aaaaahhh! *(To God.)* You think this is funny? Is that it? Why don't you answer me! *(To the Apprentice.)* Look up there. What do you see?

APPRENTICE

They're cleaning the ceiling.

CALANDRINO

And where the grime has been removed, what do you see?

APPRENTICE

Nothing.

CALANDRINO

Nothing! Exactly! Our Lord, our Great Compassionate Father, the Brush-master of the Universe, *Our Creator* ... is ... absent! He's abandoned us. I can't bear to look at it. *(Attempts to hide under the hem of the Apprentice's coat.)* I can't look! It frightens me too much!

(The Apprentice kneels with Calandrino and holds him by the shoulders. Bruno, Macco, and Simone enter.)

APPRENTICE

Thank God, you found us!

BRUNO

It wasn't hard. Calandrino's wailing can be heard clear to Sicily.

APPRENTICE

Please help. The master is in crisis. He thinks that God has abandoned him.

BRUNO

What?! *(Pulls Calandrino to his feet.)* It's the other way around, friend. *You* have abandoned *God*. What did you think would happen when decided to make sport of God's natural order?

CALANDRINO

It's not just this. *(Lifts his shirt. Bruno tugs it down.)* It's the plague, the endless winter.

MACCO

And the pope traipsing off to France?

CALANDRINO

Yes, and the pope!

SIMONE

Calm down, everyone. Now, Calandrino, you bolted so quickly out of the house that I didn't have a chance to tell you of the cure for your condition.

CALANDRINO

There's a cure?

SIMONE

Yes, as with most ailments resulting from an insult to our Lord's divine order, clemency can be achieved. All it takes is the right combination of medicines and offerings.

CALANDRINO

What must I offer?

SIMONE

Repentance, first and foremost.

CALANDRINO

I repent! (*To God.*) Do you hear me, you Big Blank Smoke-stained Emptiness? I repent!

SIMONE

Good. And then you must have a service.

CALANDRINO

I can't afford a service. Even the poorest friar in a cave charges an arm and a leg for a service.

SIMONE

It doesn't have to be anything special. You can host it yourself, at your house, but you must invite your closest friends as witnesses.

CALANDRINO

I'll do it!

BRUNO

And you must display the proper respect for the occasion and your guests.

CALANDRINO

What does that mean?

BRUNO

Well, you can't conduct a sacred ceremony like this with your friends there to support you, and then offer them a few burnt filberts in a bowl.

CALANDRINO

I can't?

BRUNO

No. If your repentance is sincere, you must serve wine. Good wine.

MACCO

Vernaccia for the ladies. Falerno for the men.

(Calandrino begins to groan.)

BRUNO

And there must be meat.

MACCO

Capon, lamb, succulent pig.

CALANDRINO

All of them?

SIMONE

And of course, you must pay for the herbs, the tincture.

CALANDRINO

Oh, the cure is worse than the malady.

MACCO

Is it, Calandrino? Think of it. A thing the size of a casaba passing through that little tiny passage.

CALANDRINO

Oh, I'll do it! I'll do it! Anything you say. This birth would be my death!

BRUNO

Good! You've made the right decision. *(To Simone.)* How long do we have?

SIMONE

A week? *(Bruno gives him a look.)* I mean, a day or two at the most.

MACCO

Leave everything to us. We'll need some cash.

CALANDRINO

How much?

BRUNO

Two hun--

SIMONE

Twenty lire!

CALANDRINO and BRUNO

Twenty?!

SIMONE

It sounds like a lot, but redemption is never cheap.

(The Apprentice helps Calandrino to the door. All exit but the woman praying by the corpse.)

ACT II. SCENE 2.

(Fresco: Calandrino's bedroom. Candlelight. Tessa and Calandrino lie awake in bed. Calandrino strokes his own stomach. They are quarreling, but their tone is subdued by the late hour.)

TESSA

Men give birth to lots of things. Mostly ideas. Ideas that grow up to be cathedrals and cities, canals, and paintings. Men give birth to wars and machines and doctrines. But they don't give birth to life! Only a woman can do that.

CALANDRINO

You heard what the master said about seahorses.

TESSA

You're not a seahorse.

CALANDRINO

And about unnatural acts.

TESSA

That quack should be jailed, or deported at the very least.

CALANDRINO

He was trained in Bologna.

TESSA

Yes, he is very full of Bologna.

CALANDRINO

He's a wise man.

TESSA

Your friends are all wise. Wise enough to trick you out of twenty lire.

CALANDRINO

I don't believe they would do anything so cruel. We're guild brothers, after all. *(Pause.)* It's too bad there's no safe way for me to deliver this child. I mean, we have wanted another.

TESSA

That's the deepest cruelty.

CALANDRINO

What do you mean?

TESSA

If I ever get the opportunity to repay them, believe me, I will. *(Pause.)* Husband, when you realize that you are not pregnant -- and you will realize it -- you must look for your own patronage. You can't keep working with these leeches.

CALANDRINO

I've told you, I have no business talent. I need them.

TESSA

No, you don't. You have all the talent you need. And you must try to give birth to some ideas.

(Pause.)

CALANDRINO

I have an idea.

TESSA

(Wary.)

You do? What kind?

CALANDRINO

An artistic kind.

TESSA

Really?

CALANDRINO

It came to me today, when I was in the church.

TESSA

Go on.

CALANDRINO

It came as I was looking up at the ceiling. They're washing it, you know. All those years of incense and candle smoke. And where they've wiped it clean, it was blank. (*Tessa waits.*) And it seemed to me that God had turned away. And it frightened me.

TESSA

It is frightening.

CALANDRINO

And I thought about this child. (*Tessa groans.*) *Our* child, Tessa. And how cruel it would be for him to look up from the baptismal font at such ... emptiness. He might get the wrong idea. It might plant in him the seeds of despair, and he would live his whole life wondering if God even cared. (*Pause.*) I want to paint that ceiling.

(The thought sinks in, and Tessa laughs softly.)

CALANDRINO (cont'd)

I know, it's ridiculous, like everything I --

TESSA

No, husband. It's not ridiculous. It's not at all. It's a great idea, a wonderful, brilliant idea. It's miraculous.

CALANDRINO

Miraculous?

TESSA

Yes! For someone to go from having no ideas -- a mind that is a desert, a wasteland of barrenness --

CALANDRINO

I get the point --

TESSA

To having a noble, masterful idea. That's a miracle.

CALANDRINO

You really think it's good?

TESSA

Everybody will see it. The citizens, the priests, counts and merchants, a bishop or cardinal could see it. And they'll all know who painted it and you'll always have work and be famous! You'll finally get the recognition you deserve. What would you paint?

CALANDRINO

All right, don't laugh.

TESSA

I will! I will! From joy.

CALANDRINO

I had the idea ... that maybe ... what I would paint ... could possibly be ...

TESSA

Say it!

CALANDRINO

Everything.

TESSA

What?

CALANDRINO

Everything. You know.

TESSA

No, I don't know.

CALANDRINO

The Bible. Everything that reminds us of God.

TESSA

The Creation?

CALANDRINO

Yes.

TESSA

All of Genesis?

CALANDRINO

All of it.

TESSA

The Flood?

CALANDRINO

(Laughs.)

And Noah getting drunk.

TESSA

The Apostles and the Passion, the Judgment, the Prophets and Sibyls, and Moses wandering and the Red Sea opening?

CALANDRINO

Yeah. *(Pause.)* Stupid idea, huh?

TESSA

Paint it.

CALANDRINO

Did you say -- ?

TESSA

Do it, husband.

CALANDRINO

It's not dumb? I'm no Giotto.

TESSA

No, you're no Giotto. You're Calandrino. Go to sleep, now. Tomorrow you can start planning. A pregnant father needs his rest.

(She blows out the candle. Blackout.)

ACT II. SCENE 3.

(Fresco: A back street of Florence. Musicians play while the characters set up the feast, bringing on a table and chairs, food and wine. All are present. Calandrino stands as Simone listens with a device to his stomach. Tessa and Lauretta look on circumspectly. Bruno and Macco stand close to the table, ready to partake as soon as the examination is complete. The Apprentice stands eagerly by. The Musicians finish playing and stay in scene.)

SIMONE

(Listening.)

Mm-hmm. Mm. Mm-hmm. Mm? Ah.

(He returns the listening device to his bag and stands.)

CALANDRINO

Doctor?

SIMONE

Praise the Almighty! You're cured! *(They all cheer, even Tessa.)* The tincture has worked. There are no signs of pregnancy whatever.

APPRENTICE

But where did the child go?

SIMONE

Returned to our Heavenly Father to be conceived another day.

CALANDRINO

Thank you, Master. Thank you!

BRUNO

Not so fast! It's not so simple, is it, doctor? What must our friend do to prevent this from ever happening again?

SIMONE

Ah, right. Contrition.

MACCO

And no more topsy-turvy, humpety-bumpety in bed.

CALANDRINO

Right.

BRUNO

And what else?

CALANDRINO

(Thinks.)

Gratitude for my friends? *(Tessa clears her throat.)* And my wife!

(Another cheer. Calandrino takes Tessa's hands. The musicians play while the two dance. Calandrino's movements are not graceful but sure. Tessa follows his lead

impeccably. The dance ends and Calandrino motions to the food and drink. All but Bruno dig in.)

BRUNO

Calandrino, you're a model citizen. An example to us all. Simone here has learned a great deal from you.

SIMONE

I have, indeed.

BRUNO

Yes, you're always extolling the wonders of Calandrino. Tell us what you've learned from this little episode.

SIMONE

Perhaps *you* could paraphrase it for us.

BRUNO

Gladly. (*Gulps wine, clears his throat.*) Just today, on the walk here, the master said, This brother of ours, Calandrino, humble of appearance, humble of aptitude, is really an exemplary servant of the Lord. Didn't you say it just that way, Simone?

SIMONE

Perhaps words to that effect.

BRUNO

Bruno, you said, what are we here on this earth to do? What is our highest purpose but to bear witness to our Lord and Savior? Each of us has been given certain talents by the Almighty and it is our duty to exercise those talents in the service of our Father. Calandrino is an artist. That is what God gave to him, if little else. Even as the bodies are stacked ever higher on the edge of town, and our certain doom has a new immediacy, it is our duty to create. And given that His judgment is so near at hand -- the earth more resembling Dante's frozen hell each day -- is it not wise for us to create humbly and subserviently?

SIMONE

How long did it take us to walk here? I must have been speaking very quickly.

BRUNO

The point, Bruno, you said, is that if Calandrino has taught us one thing by example, it is how to be humble. (*To Calandrino.*) And for this lesson, my friend, I lift my glass to you.

MACCO

Here, here!

(All raise their glasses, but Tessa, of course, who has been seething.)

TESSA

Master Simone! Your praise of my husband, if it has been accurately reported by his colleague, is much appreciated.

SIMONE

Somewhat embellished, I believe. Perhaps not entirely --

TESSA

And we appreciate all you have done to relieve my husband from his ill-conceived pregnancy.

SIMONE

All in a day's work.

TESSA

My husband has hopefully paid his debt here today, though his gratitude will endure. *(Polite applause.)* You all know my husband. You know he is a simple man. *(A few chuckles from the crowd.)* Until now, he has contracted his services to Bruno and Buffalmacco, who are both clever men and can talk themselves into jobs, despite the minor deficiencies of their work.

CALANDRINO

(Laughing without malice.)

Minor? One time Bruno painted a Madonna that was indistinguishable from an ox!

(The guests all laugh.)

TESSA

We appreciate the work they've given us. But as soon as the count's job is finished, my husband will be starting a new project without them.

BRUNO

Without us?

MACCO

Who with?

TESSA

No one. On his own.

BRUNO

Oh, right. Who will tell him what to paint?

TESSA

He's had an idea.

(Gasps. Bruno and Macco look gobsmacked.)

LAURETTA

An ... idea? Him?

SIMONE

Fascinating.

BRUNO

(Sputtering.)

Pfff. Ha! Yes, an idea. Rodents have ideas: Now I'll look for food. Now I'll defecate. Now I'll spread a little disease.

TESSA

An idea for a painting. A magnificent painting. One that you two wouldn't conceive of in a hundred years. One that will raise him to heights you can't imagine.

SIMONE

Is it true?

BRUNO

Of course, it's not true. Monna Tessa, it's natural to be upset. This has been an ordeal for you too --

TESSA

(To Calandrino.)

Tell them.

CALANDRINO

Tell them what?

TESSA

Your idea! The painting.

CALANDRINO

Should I?

SIMONE

By all means, tell us.

CALANDRINO

I have the idea ... to paint ... a ceiling.

MACCO

A ceiling? Whitewash, you mean?

CALANDRINO

No, a ceiling fresco. In the chapel down the street.

BRUNO

Oh, a ceiling fresco. Magnificent. And what would you paint? A few stars? Or perhaps the sun in all it's glory?

CALANDRINO

(Fumbling at first, but gaining passion and momentum.)

I would paint the scriptures. Mind you, the idea is still just germinating, but in the center I'd paint the stories from Genesis. Right in the middle would be two panels: The Creation of Adam and The Creation of Eve. Around that would be things like the creation of the sun and moon and planets, like you say. And there would be the snake, and the banishment from the Garden of Eden.

SIMONE

Would you paint the flood?

CALANDRINO

(Laughs.)

Yes! I was telling Tessa that it would be a hoot to show the drunkenness of Noah!

(Everyone but Bruno and Macco laughs.)

SIMONE

It's a miracle!

BRUNO

What's a miracle!

SIMONE

It's as if our friend here has given birth after all. And what else, Calandrino? What else would you paint? That's just the center, you say?

CALANDRINO

Yes, there's much more. Wall-to-wall frescoes!

(The guests cheer and applaud.)

BRUNO

It's ridiculous. Preposterous.

TESSA

No it's not! Giotto painted ceilings.

BRUNO

GIOTTO!! I am sick of that name!

TESSA

You're jealous that you didn't come up with the idea!

BRUNO

It's outrageous! Ludicrous! You can't just go in and paint the ceiling of a church. You need permission.

TESSA

We'll get it.

MACCO

You need patronage.

SIMONE

It's a very prominent location. I know of a few families who would like to have their names attached to such a project.

BRUNO

Will you shut up! This so-called "idea" is not just vain. No! It approaches the height of arrogance. Have you learned nothing, Calandrino?! I thought you'd been taught a lesson. You're a second-rate painter, with no sense of propriety and a dangerous inclination toward individuality. *YOU ARE A NINCOMPOOP!!* You haven't a brain in your head! And you have no right to an idea!

(Long, tense pause. Calandrino seems ready to strike, but Tessa takes his hand, calming him.)

CALANDRINO

Well. We'll see. Maybe you're right. Now ... enough talking. The food is going uneaten.

TESSA

And the wine undrunk. Eat! Drink!

(Eating and drinking commence. Bruno broods. At Tessa's prompting, Lauretta goes to Macco and sticks a capon leg in his mouth. Macco gives Tessa a foul look. The lights fade.)

ACT II. SCENE 4.

(No fresco. A dark alley far downstage. A Musician plays a low, moribund tune in the dark. Bruno, Macco, Simone, and the Apprentice stand in the cold moonlight.)

APPRENTICE

And for such a big job we'll need more apprentices. My cousin from Livorno is looking for work. He would be good.

SIMONE

Tell him to get in touch right away. Everyone will want to be a part of this project.

BRUNO

Listen to you.

SIMONE

What?

BRUNO

There will be no project! The gall of that idiot! If the church had the slightest inclination to paint that ceiling they would have done it already. They would have hired someone with a brain, not Calandrino.

SIMONE

You're being a bit harsh, aren't you? The man can paint. You know what they say, Every dog has his --

BRUNO

No! Every dog does *not* have his day, and I'm sick and tired of hearing it! Whoever said that first should be drowned.

SIMONE

It was originally said of the dogs who mauled Euripides to death.

BRUNO

Who?

SIMONE

Playwright. Greek.

BRUNO

Greek? Playwright? Probably deserved it.

SIMONE

Let Calandrino have his idea. It might turn out to be his masterpiece.

BRUNO

What do you think, Macco? Do you think we should let Calandrino have his idea?

MACCO

If you ask me, he's got too much already.

BRUNO

But shouldn't we help our brother to give birth to his masterpiece?

MACCO

Before one gives birth, one must be screwed. Isn't that right?

BRUNO

(Laughs humorlessly. To Simone.)

Okay, wise man of Bologna. We'll give the dog his day.

SIMONE

Don't use that tone with me.

BRUNO

We'll need your help.

SIMONE

Well, you won't get it.

BRUNO

What? I thought you were a man of science. Are you telling me you've lost your curiosity?

MACCO

A harmless experiment. That's all.

APPRENTICE

What are you talking about?

BRUNO

Don't you worry about it. *(To Simone.)* What do you say, Simone? Let's move forward with the "project." He's still got a hundred and eighty lire in his purse. Sixty per man. That could put a lot of turnips in your pot.

SIMONE

Why does he enrage you so much? What deficiency in you does he mirror?

BRUNO

Ha! Science. You ought to confine your alchemy to the elements, and leave the human mind alone. No, you misunderstand me. He's our friend, our brother. Let's just have a little fun.

MACCO

Fun, that's all we're after. He'll laugh with us in the end.

SIMONE

Will Monna Tessa be laughing with us in the end?

MACCO

If I have my way, yes, she will.

BRUNO

Come on. He's your best subject.

SIMONE

I'm getting too old for this.

BRUNO

For the sake of science? One last experiment.

(Simone nods. Bruno slaps him on the back They exit, followed by Macco. The worried Apprentice waits a moment.)

BRUNO

(Offstage.)

Come!

(The Apprentice exits gloomily. Fade.)

END OF ACT II

(Intermission.)

ACT III. SCENE 1.

(Fresco: A back street of Florence. Morning. Bruno waits in the dark alcove. A family enters, the father pushing a wheelbarrow in which there are two small corpses. They exit. Calandrino enters from the door of his house. He sets off briskly. Bruno steps into the street.)

BRUNO

Calandrino, friend.

CALANDRINO

Bruno ... *friend*.

BRUNO

Oh, come on. You're not still sore, are you? You look so much better, now that you're not in the family way. Are you feeling better?

CALANDRINO

(Anxious to move on.)

Yes, much better, thank you.

BRUNO

Where are you off to? Aren't you coming to the count's?

CALANDRINO

In a while.

BRUNO

But where to first?

CALANDRINO

(Thinks.)

Nowhere.

BRUNO

Not supposed to tell me, eh? Are we not brothers?

CALANDRINO

Brothers are often cruel to each other, aren't they? *(Bruno gives him a hurt look.)* Some people -- with better judgment than mine -- would rather I not divulge ... things to you.

BRUNO

Ah, some people. Then don't. Tell me nothing.

CALANDRINO

It's not that I want to keep things from --

BRUNO

No, no. It's all right. By all means. Some things are best kept to --

CALANDRINO

I'm off to see Fra Lodovico.

BRUNO

Ah, the project?

CALANDRINO

Yes, but I'm not supposed to tell you. Tessa would skin me alive.

BRUNO

Don't worry. My lips are sealed. But do you think you have enough sway with the monsignor?

CALANDRINO

Frankly, I'm scared to death. The man's an ogre. I think his skin actually has a green tinge to it. That's how I would paint him.

BRUNO

For that matter, is the monsignor the right person to see? I would think you'd need permission from the bishop, or even a cardinal.

CALANDRINO

Well, it's the monsignor's church. I'm going to talk to him. Don't even mention bishops and cardinals or I'll puke.

BRUNO

I have to say, I admire your resolve. Why are you so determined, if it makes you so nervous?

CALANDRINO

Never mind why.

BRUNO

Yours is a big plan. You need the help of someone with connections.

CALANDRINO

Who do we know like that? No one, is who.

BRUNO

Master Simone has connections. He knows just about every powerful person in town. He might be able to help us. But, um, his time is valuable. We can't just expect him to help us for nothing.

CALANDRINO

I have nothing to pay him with. I'll take my chances with Fra Lodovico. (*Starts to move on.*)

BRUNO

No, no. A first consultation is free. We must go to Simone. It's the only smart thing to do.

CALANDRINO

Well, I'm not so smart, am I? That's what you said last night.

BRUNO

Oh, would you stop! (*Calandrino glowers.*) Please. Forgive me, friend. I had a little too much to drink. I didn't know what I was saying. Of course, you're plenty smart. Not a genius, but then who is? Right?

CALANDRINO

Maybe you and Macco. Are you geniuses? Compared to me? (*A standoff. Then surrender.*) Hell, I don't know what I'd say to the monsignor anyway.

BRUNO

Right! To Simone's.

(He hooks Calandrino's arm in his own. They exit.)

ACT III. SCENE 2.

(Fresco: Master Simone's rooms. Simone, Bruno, Macco, and Calandrino are around the table. The Apprentice stands off to the side.)

SIMONE

Your most important task as chief designer is to stay focused on the art itself. If you occupy yourself with the politics of the project, you'll be distracted and the design will suffer. You don't want that, do you?

CALANDRINO

Diplomacy is not my strength. You know that. I tend to offend people at every turn. If I catch a whiff of something that smells like politics, I turn and run.

SIMONE

Then you leave that to me. I've already started compiling a list of possible patrons. Not only that, but ... and I hesitate to say this too soon ... I'm hoping that the Vicar of Christ himself will sanction this undertaking. (*Calandrino stares.*) The pope?

CALANDRINO

The pope?! (*Thinks. Then laughs.*) You're pulling my leg, right? People often pull other people's legs about the pope. I've had my own leg pulled!

SIMONE

Dead serious.

CALANDRINO

(*Suddenly stunned.*)

I need to sit down.

MACCO

You *are* sitting.

CALANDRINO

Oh.

SIMONE

My connections are very powerful. At the very least, we'll get a cardinal or two to give their blessings to the project. This alone will be enough to entice the rich and vain to contribute. If the pope were in, we'd have to turn money away! (*Off Calandrino's look.*) What's wrong? You're not feeling ill again, are you?

CALANDRINO

Master, why do so many people need to be involved? I'm having second thoughts.

BRUNO

A *second* thought? There's no end of miracles.

SIMONE

There's no other way. You need money to get a project like this done. You want to do this, don't you?

CALANDRINO

(*Rising bravely.*)

Yes, I do.

SIMONE

Promise you won't back out? I can't waste my time.

CALANDRINO

You'll take care of the arrangements then? (*Simone nods.*) I promise. When do we start?

SIMONE

Immediately.

BRUNO

(Pulling Calandrino downstage.)

Now, there's something else I need to tell you. Something very important and very secret. You can't tell a soul, not even your wife.

CALANDRINO

What is it?

BRUNO

I have been making inquiries into the availability of a certain rare substance. Known by various names -- Star Powder or Astral Talc, Heaven's Ash ... Venus Dew in its liquid form -- it is, simply, diamond dust.

CALANDRINO

(Intrigued.)

What?

BRUNO

But not made from your ordinary, everyday diamond. No. Only a diamond mined from the bowels of a particular active volcano in Africa.

SIMONE

Really? Which volcano?

BRUNO

The, uh ... *(Snaps his fingers at Macco.)*

MACCO

Goo-boo Goo-boo volcano.

BRUNO

The very one.

CALANDRINO

What about this dust?

BRUNO

It is said, and it has been written, that when this dust is mixed with the *intonaco* of a fresco, the colors of the painting adopt the luminescence of Heaven itself.

CALANDRINO

Really!

BRUNO

The secret has been kept for centuries.

MACCO

The ancient Phoenicians were the last to use it. You've heard of the Great Palace Hall of ... Urb?

CALANDRINO

(Lying.)

Oh, yes, of course.

BRUNO

It's said that the frescoes were so brilliant, you had to shield your eyes. You couldn't look at them directly or you'd go blind.

CALANDRINO

Do we want that?

MACCO

Too much diamond dust. We'd use a less liberal portion.

BRUNO

But enough to make your ceiling the Eighth Wonder of the World. Pilgrims from the edges of the earth would come to view it.

CALANDRINO

How do we get it?

BRUNO

I'll take care of that. We'll talk about the cost later. But there's one caveat, one catch.

CALANDRINO

What's that?

MACCO

The diamond dust is very sensitive to ... environmental influences.

Such as?

CALANDRINO

Textiles.

BRUNO

I don't follow.

CALANDRINO

BRUNO

If the diamond dust is exposed to textiles, anywhere within a twenty foot radius, before it is dry, it will lose its luster.

CALANDRINO

What good would it be then?

BRUNO

None.

CALANDRINO

Fine then. No textiles.

(Pause.)

MACCO

Do you know what that means, Calandrino?

CALANDRINO

Of course. No textiles, no cloth, no towels. *(Pause. Gets it.)* No clothes? *(Bruno and Macco nod.)* Oh, I see. Really? I'd have to paint ... in the nude?

MACCO

And with no drapes to conceal your nudity.

CALANDRINO

Everyone will see me?

BRUNO

You'll work at night. No one will see. Think of it, the Creation of Light and the sun and stars glowing throughout the ages!

CALANDRINO

(Thinks.)

I'll do it!

(Bruno shakes his hand.)

BRUNO

Good man.

MACCO

And one more thing.

CALANDRINO

Yet another thing? This is all too much! I'd quit now, except that I've given my word that I won't.

MACCO

A simple thing. Master Simone will back me up on this. While you're working on this project it would be a good idea for you to practice celibacy.

CALANDRINO

What?!

MACCO

It's a well-known fact that ... sexual activity decreases one's ... creative capacity. If you are preparing to paint the Eighth Wonder of the World, don't you think you owe it to God and humanity to offer your purest creativity?

CALANDRINO

Tessa won't like this. Not at all. She wants a child.

MACCO

Plenty of time for that later. Think of the work.

CALANDRINO

Well ... she *has* been wearing me out lately. *(Macco grimaces.)* Once a day is never enough for her. I could use a breather. But how could I explain it to her?

MACCO

Tell her that this project is the most important thing in the world. More important than making babies or her selfish little needs.

CALANDRINO

I'll tell her you said so.

BRUNO

No, don't tell her that! Don't tell her anything about the project. When she asks, say that you have everything under control. Say nothing of Macco or me or the doctor. You're in charge. Got it? *(Calandrino nods.)* All right then, off to the count's. I'll join you shortly.

(Macco and Calandrino exit.)

BRUNO (cont'd)

You won't regret this, Simone. Florence will be laughing about this for years.

SIMONE

I already regret it. *(Pause.)* Florence?

BRUNO

We don't want Calandrino to be lonely on the first night of principal painting. All of Florence must be invited.

APPRENTICE

I don't like what you're doing to Master Calandrino. It's not fair. I'll tell him.

BRUNO

You'll do no such thing!

APPRENTICE

I will!

BRUNO

(Trying to stay calm. To Simone.)

Do try to get at least a bishop to attend the unveiling. *(To Apprentice.)* You, come with me.

(He grabs the Apprentice by the collar and they exit. Blackout.)

ACT III. SCENE 3.

(No fresco. Church scaffolding. Only the top six feet or so of the scaffolding can be seen. The light is dim, with the stage itself in darkness. The Apprentice followed by Bruno climb up out of the darkness to the platform and stand, a little hunched over due to the proximity of the ceiling.)

BRUNO

Well? *(The Apprentice looks around, unsure why he's been brought here.)* Are you inspired?

APPRENTICE

I'm a little dizzy.

BRUNO

But not inspired? (*The Apprentice shakes his head.*) Because this is where *he* got his inspiration. This is where Calandrino's great plan was conceived, where the modern master, the second coming of Giotto, was reborn into the realm of ideas. But look, what do you see?

APPRENTICE

The place where Master Calandrino will paint?

BRUNO

No! That's not what you see. You see nothing. Nothing! (*Calms himself.*) Do you know why the master saw something here? Because he's a fool. He believes whatever he's told or tells himself. If his mind says, Here on this blank ceiling is the Creation and here the Final Judgment, he believes it. And his belief is very dangerous. (*Advances on the Apprentice who takes a step in retreat.*) You listen to me. There is no revolution. Not here. Not now. We are born and we die. In between we are alive, serving the Lord and being just so-so. Nothing else.

APPRENTICE

Then why should we paint?

(Bruno advances, the Apprentice retreats.)

BRUNO

What?!

APPRENTICE

Don't we paint to renew?

BRUNO

Renew what?

APPRENTICE

The walls. Our spirits. Our minds.

(Advance, retreat. The Apprentice now stands too close to the edge of the platform for safety.)

BRUNO

No! No! No! We paint to decorate! We paint because it is civilized and sane! We paint for the same reason we wear clothes. To cover up the ugly details. God's only desire for us is to live organized, dutiful, decorative lives, and then to die.

APPRENTICE

You can't do this to Master Calandrino. I won't let you!

BRUNO

There will be no revolution! Calandrino will learn this once and for all. Do you understand me? (*Twirls around with his arms wide.*) No revolution!

(He knocks the Apprentice off his feet. The Apprentice falls to the platform and rolls off the edge, but manages a precarious grip on the edge of the scaffolding.)

APPRENTICE

Master! Help! I can't hold on!

(Bruno is at first shocked, then curious, and then resigned. He kneels and puts his hands together in prayer.)

BRUNO

I will pray for your redemption. (*Looking up.*) Heavenly Father, if it is in your plan --

APPRENTICE

Help me! Take my hand!

BRUNO

To save this unfortunate soul. (*Looks at the Apprentice.*) Now's the time.

APPRENTICE

I can't ...

(The Apprentice loses his grip and falls into the darkness. A second later there is a thud.)

BRUNO

(Looking down and then up.)

Thy will be done. (*Feigning alarm.*) Help! Someone please help! Oh, unfortunate accident!

(Blackout.)

END OF ACT III

(Musical interlude. No intermission.)

ACT IV. SCENE 1.

(In the dark, Lauretta emits a howl registering somewhere between rabidity and ecstasy. She ululates, speaks in tongues. Lights rise. Fresco: Calandrino's bedroom. Lauretta has cornered Calandrino, who cowers more in alarm than fear. She continues to incant as she waves bundles of herbs at him and spritzes him with a potion. Tessa looks on from the other side of the bed.)

CALANDRINO

Stop it! Leave me alone! Will you tell her to stop?

TESSA

You brought this on yourself. How did you think she would react when you stopped sharing my bed?

CALANDRINO

I share your bed!

TESSA

You know what I mean!

(Calandrino ducks under Lauretta's arm and tries to run for it, but she tackles him on the bed.)

LAURETTA

You're not going anywhere until your humors are restored.

CALANDRINO

It's only temporary. Just until I've painted the church ceiling.

TESSA

That could take years! After two weeks I'm ready to jump out a window!

CALANDRINO

But I have to preserve my creative juices.

TESSA

I'll give you creative juices!

(She lunges for him on the bed, but he escapes. He goes to the door.)

CALANDRINO

I'm making progress, Tessa. Don't interfere with the project now, please!

TESSA

You're supposed to be creating a baby! I want a baby!

CALANDRINO

Don't wait up for me.

(He runs out.)

TESSA

Oh, that ... that ...

LAURETTA

Don't say it. He's a numskull, yes, but the more you say it, the truer it becomes.

TESSA

What are we going to do?

LAURETTA

This is a hard case. I'm using some very powerful potions: verbena and lavender stuffed with horse dung, bull urine spiked with holy water -- ten percent by volume!

TESSA

We need something stronger.

LAURETTA

No, I've never seen this fail. He's under someone else's spell.

TESSA

Simone?

LAURETTA

Has to be.

TESSA

What'll we do?

LAURETTA

I need to know what kind of spell it is.

TESSA

The kind that makes him impotent!

LAURETTA

It's not that simple.

TESSA

I'll go to Simone.

LAURETTA

No, he'll be evasive, and he'll know we're onto him. Give me some time to study this.

TESSA

(Storming out.)

I'm running out of time! I need a child *now*!

(Blackout.)

ACT IV. SCENE 2.

(Fresco: The count's portico. As in Act I, Scene 2, there are three fresco panels and a workbench, but no platforms. The first two frescoes are completed. Macco kneels at the third, finishing up the bottom portion of the painting. Tessa enters. Macco scrambles to his feet.)

MACCO

Monna Tessa, what brings you -- ?

TESSA

Where's your boss?

MACCO

The count?

TESSA

Bruno.

MACCO

He's hardly my --

TESSA

Where is he?

MACCO

Off interviewing apprentices. Such a tragedy. The last one was so young and so good. Bruno's just now adjusting to the loss. Why do you want to see him?

TESSA

I need to ask him something.

MACCO

You can ask me.

TESSA

(Considers this.)

I know Master Simone has done something to my husband. I want to know what.

MACCO

I see.

TESSA

You know, don't you? I can see it in your eyes. What is it!

MACCO

I really can't say.

TESSA

Tell me! *(She pounds his chest with her fists.)* He's turned my husband into a eunuch!

MACCO

(Grabbing her arms. Calmly.)

I'm sworn to secrecy.

(She breaks away from him.)

TESSA

Tell me. Please, tell me.

MACCO

I've sworn my oath. And yet, I'm not without deep sympathy for you. I know how much you and your husband want another child.

TESSA

Don't you talk about that.

MACCO

Losing an infant --

TESSA

That's our business!

MACCO

And so I would love to tell you what I know.

TESSA

Tell me!

MACCO

There would be a very big price to pay. I would lose all my credibility with my friends. They would never trust me again. And ... *(Pause.)* What would I get in return?

TESSA

(Fuming, turns away.)

Forget it.

MACCO

Pardon?

TESSA

I know what you want. You're transparent. You want only one thing.

MACCO

Think about it. You want a child and your husband refuses to give you one. He's failed you. *(Approaching her.)* Whereas, I wouldn't. *(Pause.)* And I would tell you exactly what you want to know.

TESSA

There's no other way?

MACCO

An even trade: my honor for yours.

TESSA

(Walking off.)

Go to hell.

(Blackout.)

ACT IV. SCENE 3.

(Fresco: Calandrino's studio. A dim room with shelves cluttered with minerals. Calandrino stands by an easel upon which are a stack of drawings, the first one hidden under a blank sheet. Bruno, Macco, and Simone flank the easel. Some may be sitting, but Simone must be standing.)

BRUNO

I've settled on one or two who might be adequate. But this new generation is, on the whole, unpromising.

SIMONE

Why is that?

BRUNO

They don't know their place. They're mere apprentices, and yet they all have ideas about technique and composition. They all have Giotto in their eyes. Like our friend, Calandrino.

(Bruno and Macco chuckle. Calandrino laughs uneasily.)

SIMONE

Yes, well, we'll see how much of Giotto Calandrino has in him. Won't we? These designs of yours better be of the highest quality. Some very important people have their eye on this project.

CALANDRINO

Such as?

SIMONE

Does the name Angelo Acciaioli ring a bell?

CALANDRINO

(Stricken.)

The bishop? Really? Who else?

SIMONE

Some very influential families are interested, the Albizzis, the Strozzi, and that nice wool making family ... what's their name?

MACCO

The Medicis?

SIMONE

That's them.

BRUNO

It doesn't matter who's got their eye on the project *now*. It's afterwards that counts. *(To Calandrino.)* You have to paint it first. You have to do your best work.

SIMONE

Quite right. We're here to see your designs. Let's see them!

(They all look to Calandrino.)

CALANDRINO

Well, uh, I've been working on some ideas. They're nothing much yet, just some doodling. If any of you have any suggestions --

BRUNO

Just show us. We're not expecting much.

MACCO

Right, it's not like we're the bishop or the Albizzis, who'll be very tough critics.

CALANDRINO

Okay. All right. I'll show you. This first one is what I'm thinking might ... well, could be used for the centerpiece, the very middle of the painting, where everyone's eyes would be drawn.

BRUNO

Show us!

(Calandrino reaches for the cover sheet, hesitates, pulls it away to reveal a simple but well-rendered sketch of two hands, index fingers almost, but not quite touching. The drawing should suggest the Michelangelo without being an exact replica. Pause, then Bruno and Macco laugh.)

BRUNO

Yes, I see it. I see it very clearly!

MACCO

It's brilliant! It will become known as ... as ...

BRUNO

Two hands touching!

(They howl. Simone is transfixed.)

SIMONE

Wait. Wait a minute. Will you two shut up! *(Bruno and Macco rein it in.)* Calandrino, what is this? What are you showing us?

CALANDRINO

I know, it's not very good. It's incomplete. I shouldn't have --

SIMONE

No, no, that's not what I'm getting at. Explain what you intend here.

CALANDRINO

It's just a detail, this is the hand of God, and this of Adam. It's the moment of man's creation.

SIMONE

But ... the hands seem almost ... relaxed. I would have thought the moment to be more ... tumultuous.

CALANDRINO

Maybe, but what I thought ... and this might be my barren mind failing me, but ... what I thought was that after creating the light and the dark and the sun and moon and planets ... the creation of man might have been ... easy.

(Bruno and Macco roar.)

SIMONE

Easy.

CALANDRINO

Simple. Not much work. If you look at the whole image ...

(He pulls away the first drawing to reveal God and Adam, again similar but not identical to the Michelangelo, very well drawn and striking. Bruno and Macco stop laughing. All are stunned.)

CALANDRINO (cont'd)

To me it seemed like the creation of Adam might have been ... kind of ... serene.

MACCO

Well. That's ... pretty good.

(Simone stumbles to one knee. The lights narrow on him as he suffers some sort of fugue, as before a stroke or seizure.)

CALANDRINO

Master, are you all right? What's wrong?

(Music. Appearing above the stage, but seen only by Simone, is a projection of Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam, at first distorted but coming to clarity.)

SIMONE

What ... what's that?

CALANDRINO

My drawing, master. The Creation of Adam.

SIMONE

No, that! It's ... unusual. It's ... made of light. Original light. Is there more?

(Calandrino reveals the next drawing: The Flood. Michelangelo's painting of the flood is projected, at first distorted, then clear.)

SIMONE (cont'd)

I see it! It's terrifying. The panic, the loss!

(The next drawing/projection: The Banishment.)

SIMONE (cont'd)

(Almost in tears.)

Poor souls! Poor doomed, naked souls!

(As Calandrino leafs through the drawings, a collage of Sistine Chapel paintings appears, each scene evoking gasps and moans from Simone, until he finally collapses. The lights change. The projection disappears.)

CALANDRINO

Master, what's wrong?

SIMONE

Nothing, help me. Help me up.

(They help him into a chair.)

BRUNO

Really, Simone, they're not *that* bad.

SIMONE

Bad?

BRUNO

Terrifying? Doomed? Isn't that what you were muttering? The compositions are a little overboard, I'd say. But then we've always had this problem with Calandrino.

MACCO

But it's his moment of glory, not ours. We have no say in the design. He's free to proceed as he likes.

BRUNO

No, I wouldn't stop now. I'd say keep going, by all means. Wouldn't you, Simone?

SIMONE

(Pause. To Calandrino.)

Carry on.

CALANDRINO

Do you think the designs are ... acceptable?

BRUNO

You heard him, Calandrino. The plan moves forward!

MACCO

We're behind you all the way.

(The lights change again. The projection returns: The Banishment.)

SIMONE

Paint it.

(Blackout.)

ACT IV. SCENE 5.

(Fresco: Calandrino's bedroom. Tessa is under the covers asleep. Calandrino enters and begin to undress silently. Tessa's eyes open and she watches him a moment.)

TESSA

What's happened to you?

CALANDRINO

What happened? Nothing.

TESSA

Something has changed.

CALANDRINO

Nothing has changed. What could have changed? I don't even know what you're talking

about. Go back to sleep.

TESSA

You've changed.

CALANDRINO

No I haven't.

TESSA

I came to your studio today, but you weren't there.

CALANDRINO

I must have stepped out.

TESSA

I saw your drawings.

CALANDRINO

Oh?

TESSA

It's the best work you've ever done, not just the drawings themselves, but the thought that went into them.

CALANDRINO

Thought? No thought went into them. Only a feeling.

TESSA

What feeling?

CALANDRINO

I guess ... hopelessness. And hope. Combined. (*Tessa waits.*) You like them, then?

TESSA

They're good.

CALANDRINO

Let's go to sleep. I'm tired.

TESSA

Make love to me.

CALANDRINO

Tessa, I told you. I can't.

TESSA

Make love to me!

CALANDRINO

When I'm done --

TESSA

Now! I can't wait that long! You have your ceiling. I want my child.

CALANDRINO

I can only create one thing at a time.

TESSA

Who told you that?

CALANDRINO

Nobody told me that.

TESSA

What did they do to you? You tell me. Tell me now! Did you make a deal?

CALANDRINO

What kind of deal?

TESSA

With Simone? Or the devil?

CALANDRINO

No.

TESSA

Even if you made a deal with God, I want you to stop it.

CALANDRINO

You don't want me to paint the church?

TESSA

Aha! You *did* make a deal!

CALANDRINO

Why can't you wait? I thought you wanted me to take charge. So I'm taking charge!

TESSA

(Laughs bitterly.)

Like this? Tell me what they've done. Tell me what's happened. (*Calandrino puts his coat back on.*) Don't leave!

CALANDRINO

You want me to be a great painter. You want me to strike out on my own and make a name for myself. And when I go out and try to do that, you want to ruin it. I don't understand you!

TESSA

You can't stop living your life just to paint. You have to pay attention to me too.

CALANDRINO

You want everything! Don't you? Well, I can't do everything at once. I can't have ideas and a family and whatever else you want from me all at the same time! It's too hard. The world is too hard. These ideas cause me nothing but pain. Working on this project, I feel like I've been skinned alive and smeared with salt. Just let me paint, and later, I promise you, we'll have our family.

TESSA

Don't make me have to find out on my own. Tell me now, or you may regret it.

(He exits. Blackout.)

END OF ACT IV

(Musical interlude. No intermission.)

ACT V. SCENE 1.

(Fresco: Another bedroom. Night. A single lantern lights the room. Mystical paintings, amulets, and masks hang on the wall behind the bed. Tessa enters slowly. Macco follows. She stops well short of the bed. They look at each other a moment.)

MACCO

Who's place is this?

TESSA

A friend's. *(Pause.)* Okay, so what have you done to my husband?

MACCO

(Laughs.)

What have *I* done? I've done nothing.

TESSA

Simone, then?

MACCO

The deal is, we make love and *then* I tell you.

TESSA

Love.

MACCO

Yes, which raises the question, why would you agree to this?

TESSA

Why do you think?

(As Macco speaks, he and Tessa circle each other warily, moving closer to the bed.)

MACCO

It's a conundrum. If you said you were doing this out of love for your husband, that wouldn't make sense. Because if you loved him, you wouldn't do it. You'd find some other means of helping him. It could be that you're starved for ... affection. Your husband has spent so much time in the studio the past few weeks, and you strike me as a woman of exceptional hungers. And yet, you know it would be very dangerous to sleep with me, a friend of your husband's who could easily tell on you.

TESSA

I expect you to.

MACCO

(Laughs.)

Maybe you'll tell me it's because you desperately want a child, which is true, isn't it? *(Tessa doesn't respond.)* Calandrino won't or can't give you one, and so you've chosen me as a surrogate -- though there are no doubt dozens of men in Florence who would gladly provide the same service -- perhaps because I'm a painter, like he is, and in reasonable health. That could be it. But it's hard to imagine that your maternal instinct is so potent that it would overpower your commitment to fidelity.

TESSA

It seems there's no explanation, then.

MACCO

Not so fast. There's one explanation that may be the least credible, but which I would be willing to believe.

TESSA

And that is?

MACCO

You find me irresistible.

TESSA

Why would you believe that?

MACCO

Because I'm vain.

TESSA

You know what? Someday soon, and for years to follow, perhaps centuries, your name will be famous. Buffalmacco, painter of frescoes.

MACCO

You think so? Why?

TESSA

Not because you're a great painter -- far from it -- but because your vanity is so enormous, you'll escape no one's attention.

MACCO

Thank you.

TESSA

Turn out the lantern and get into bed. I'll undress in the next room.

(She exits. He turns the lantern low so the room is mostly dark. Music. We see Macco's silhouette undressing and getting into bed. A woman's silhouette enters and joins him. The music gets louder and more raucous as the couple in bed thrash in silhouette. They pantomime a number of wild sexual positions, and when the music stops, Macco shouts in ecstasy and collapses. A moment of silence, while another woman enters in silhouette and kneels close to the woman in bed. The room is still dark.)

TESSA

Tell me.

MACCO

That was exceptional. Where did you learn to make love like that? Oh! The best ever. No doubt about it.

TESSA

Thank you. What spell has been put on my husband?

MACCO

(Laughing.)

Spell? Your husband is under no spell. Unless you count the one he was born under. Monna Tessa, why are you married to such a lamebrain? You could do so much better. He's as coarse as a gorilla.

TESSA

We had a bargain. Tell me what you know.

MACCO

All right, but can we do it again afterward? I beg you.

TESSA

Sure, as many times as you like.

(Macco gets out of bed and paces on his side of the bed.)

MACCO

All right, I don't care what Bruno says, I'll tell you. There's no spell. Bruno, Simone, and I have planned a little joke. Nothing harmful. Just a little fun at your husband's expense. We told him that his *intonaco* will contain diamond dust from the Boo-goo Boo-goo volcano in Africa.

TESSA

Boo-goo?

MACCO

Or Goo-boo, I forget which. And this dust will make his frescoes shine like a heavenly vision. But we told him the dust is sensitive to textiles, and clothing will ruin its effect. So ... he has to paint in the nude.

TESSA

I see. So you and Simone and Bruno will have a good laugh.

MACCO

Not just us. You see, a great deal of Florence has been invited to the first night of principal painting. As he's climbing to the top of the scaffold ... *(he's laughing now)* ... they'll all enter the church very quietly. And when he lights his lantern, we'll all have a big laugh! Ha! Even Bishop Acciaiuoli will be there.

(As Macco laughs, the woman kneeling by the bed stands and lights the lantern. It is Tessa, fully dressed. The woman in bed has hidden herself under the blanket.)

MACCO

(Still chuckling.)

Tessa, forgive me. It's just so funny. We mean no harm to your husband.

TESSA

No harm? Do you know how much this project means to him? Do you know how it has changed him?

MACCO

(Confused.)

How did you get dressed so quickly? I thought you said we could do it again.

TESSA

(Pointing to the woman in bed.)

As many times as she allows.

(The covers droop to reveal Lauretta's beaming face.)

LAURETTA

You're hot!

(Macco stares in horror.)

MACCO

What?!? You mean, you ... she ... I ...?! Nooooo! Oh, no! How could you do this to me?

LAURETTA

Didn't you just say it was the best ever?

MACCO

No! Yes! Yes, it was ... fantastic. But it's ... it's ... you!

(Lauretta laughs.)

TESSA

(Gets in Macco's face.)

You bastard! You and your friends are nothing! You have no talent. When they see my husband's ceiling, they'll scrape every fresco you ever painted off the wall and pay Calandrino to replace them.

MACCO

There won't be a ceiling.

TESSA

Yes there will. I'm putting an end to your joke. I'm going to my husband right now and telling him everything.

MACCO

It's too late.

TESSA

What do you mean?

MACCO

Tonight ... is the first night of principal painting. As we speak. I'd be there myself, but I couldn't pass up ... what I thought I was getting.

(The news enrages Tessa. She slugs Macco and pushes him aside, then runs out. Pause. Lauretta pats the bed next to her. Macco wants to leave, but can't. He slumps toward the bed and gets in. Lauretta blows out the lantern. Blackout.)

ACT V. SCENE 2.

(Fresco: Church nave and altar. Night. Calandrino enters alone carrying a candle. He kneels and looks up.)

CALANDRINO

Heavenly Father, I don't know what to say. I want to say, Forgive me. I would like you to forgive me for my many faults and deficiencies, but one of the main reasons I'd be asking for forgiveness is to appear humble before you, because I need your help now. But since you know everything, it would be stupid for me to try and trick you. The most brilliant man in the world is dull in your light, and I am dull even in the light of this small flame. So the only thing I can think of to do is to speak my mind honestly. Maybe you'll appreciate that. Or maybe not. I could be screwing everything up, but here goes ...

I hate you. From the moment I saw your blank face up there, your total lack of regard for all of us down here, I've hated you. My mother told me never to use that word. And I seldom have. But I use it now with ... real sincerity. I hate you with every particle of my body and soul and meager mind.

We, your children, are just objects for you to torture. Like little flies you kill for sport. Or ... or grapes that you stomp on to make a rank wine of bile and blood and misery. We're suffering here. It's not a pleasant sight. The good and bad alike, the saints and villains, you treat us all the same. The stench of our rotting souls, the slow freeze of our spirits, is really too much to take. Everyone's going to end up hating you if you don't do something about it.

So you could start by helping me. You like the arts, don't you? You created imagination. Painting, music, architecture, poetry. It's all good. I've had this idea, and if you help me paint it, people might not hate you so much. It might make them feel better, as they're kneeling by the bluish, puss-filled bodies of their dead daughters and uncles, to look up and see that you at least endorse the creation of beautiful things. It's a small favor I'm asking -- to ease the spirits of those who have lost so much. If you won't do it for me, would you do it for Tessa? And the child that was? And the child that may be?

(Pause.)

Any response? *(Pause.)* I didn't think so.

(Bruno and Simone enter, both carrying candles.)

BRUNO

Ah, Calandrino, prompt for once. What are you doing on your knees?

CALANDRINO

Praying for God's help.

BRUNO

You'll need it. *(Laughs.)* Just kidding. Get up. *(Calandrino rises. Bruno pulls a bag from his cloak.)* Here it is, that rarest of substances, Diana's Breath, Distillate of Holy Smoke --

CALANDRINO

Diamond dust?

BRUNO

The same.

(Calandrino takes the bag and looks inside.)

CALANDRINO

It looks like sand.

BRUNO

Indeed, but add it to your *intonaco* and it will render you immortal.

CALANDRINO

But this bag is made of cloth. I thought you said --

BRUNO

Susceptible to contamination only when mixed with lime.

SIMONE

(Struggling.)

Calandrino, my friend. I want you to know that, no matter how this project goes, you have my utmost esteem. Your designs --

BRUNO

Enough. We can't keep our public waiting.

CALANDRINO

What public?

BRUNO

The public who will witness your ... glory ... eventually.

CALANDRINO

Where's Buffalmacco?

BRUNO

Out pleasuring some hussy, no doubt.

CALANDRINO

I thought he was going to mix my paints.

BRUNO

Yes, yes, he'll be here soon. You're getting a little distrustful these days. I like the old unquestioning Calandrino better. This is not the time to question or doubt. You have *intonaco* to lay.

CALANDRINO

All right. No more questions. The time has come.

(He slings the bag of diamond dust over his left shoulder.)

BRUNO

That's right. A new beginning.

(Calandrino goes to the scaffolding, hesitates, comes back to Bruno and Simone.)

CALANDRINO

I know what you think. That I'm doing this for my own personal gain. But I'm not.

SIMONE

Calandrino --

BRUNO

(Barely hiding his contempt.)

Oh, yes, yes. You're doing the right thing. You think that God is wrongheaded, don't you? With all this dying. You think things should change, that tradition is in need of repair.

CALANDRINO

What I think is not as complex as that.

BRUNO

Well, whether you can hear yourself thinking it or not, that's what you think.

CALANDRINO

If you say so.

BRUNO

Well, begin the revolution tonight -- a *renaissance* as the French say. From this night forward, all of humanity will look back and say, that's when it changed, the night that Calandrino exposed the truth for all to see. Well, go to it. *(Pause.)* Let's just snuff these candles. Then you may undress and climb to your destiny.

(The three men blow out their candles. Blackout onstage. Only the dome above them glows.)

CALANDRINO

I'm undressing now.

BRUNO

Good. *(Pause.)* Are you done?

CALANDRINO

Yes.

BRUNO

You are completely naked? Because if you retain a single shred of clothing --

CALANDRINO

I'm naked!

BRUNO

Good. You may go up. Your tools are waiting.

(Calandrino can be heard climbing the scaffolding.)

BRUNO

(Whispering.)

Tell the others to come in. Quickly.

(We hear murmurs and the sound of hundreds of shuffling feet.)

BRUNO (cont'd)

(Whispering.)

Quietly! Keep your voices down. Everybody into place. Squeeze in. Hush now.

CALANDRINO

(Offstage, from above.)

What did you say?

BRUNO

Uh, nothing! Nothing at all! *(The crowd hushes.)* Calandrino! *(Pause.)* Calandrino, are you at the top?

CALANDRINO *(offstage, above)*

I am.

BRUNO

Light the lantern so we can see you!

(The wall above the nave lights up, but not enough to reveal the "crowd" below. In the middle of the wall is Calandrino's larger-than-life shadow. He stands after lighting the lantern, and, with the bag of diamond dust still slung over his left shoulder, he assumes the pose of Michelangelo's David. We hear uproarious laughter from

the crowd. Calandrino's shadow is startled.)

CALANDRINO (*offstage, above*)

What's that? Who's down there!?!

(Calandrino's shadow shifts as he looks down. With his legs spread wide we see the shadow of his enormous penis hanging between his legs. A good three or four feet long on the wall, the thing in real life must be abnormally long. The laughter continues a while and then subsides. Dead silence, and then a woman screams. The hubbub of shocked onlookers is heard, as well as cries of "God have mercy!" and "Sweet Mother of God! Can you believe it?" Then there is applause. Calandrino's shadow takes a bow.)

BRUNO

(Confused.)

What? Why are you clapping?

(Cheers of "Bravo!" and "It's gigantic!" and "Like a horse!".)

BRUNO (*cont'd*)

(Furious.)

He is not to be applauded! He is to be jeered! *(The applause continues.)* OUT!
EVERYBODY OUT! YOU, TOO, BISHOP! I WON'T STAND FOR THIS!!!

(Hundreds of feet shuffle out of the church. Calandrino's shadow assumes its David pose. A spot rises on Simone, who is wavering. He stares in wonder at the shadow as it transforms into an image of Michelangelo's David. Music.)

SIMONE

Praise to God! Oh, glory!

(Bruno grabs Simone.)

BRUNO

What? What's wrong with you?!? Haven't you ever seen a man before?

SIMONE

Oh, heavenly vision! Don't you see it?

BRUNO

I SEE A NAKED IMBECILE! WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!?

SIMONE

Naked, yes! Bare, stripped, *nothing much!* And perfect!

(Simone collapses to his knees. David becomes a shadow again.)

CALANDRINO *(offstage, above)*

Bruno, here's your diamond dust.

(Calandrino unshoulders the sack and lets it drop to the stage with a thud.)

BRUNO

It's sand.

CALANDRINO *(offstage, above)*

I know.

BRUNO

You do not know.

CALANDRINO *(offstage, above)*

I had a feeling.

BRUNO

If you had a feeling, why did you go through with it?

CALANDRINO *(offstage, above)*

I wanted ... to believe.

BRUNO

And so you willingly stripped naked in the church.

CALANDRINO *(offstage, above)*

I'm always naked ... under my clothes.

BRUNO

Sir, you lack a fundamental grasp of logic.

CALANDRINO *(offstage, above)*

What I mean is ... I always feel exposed. You know, unprotected. It's how painting makes me feel. And Tessa. To strip naked in church didn't seem like much of a stretch.

BRUNO

You're a disgrace.

Bruno?
CALANDRINO (*offstage, above*)

What!
BRUNO

CALANDRINO (*offstage, above*)
Tell me the truth. In a million years, you would not have conceived of a painting as good as these designs were destined to be, would you?

BRUNO
I wouldn't say that.

CALANDRINO (*offstage, above*)
But it's true, isn't it?

BRUNO
I would not say it!

CALANDRINO (*offstage, above*)
Friend, do you know why you'll never be a good painter? (*No answer.*) Because you're too well cloaked.

(Simone laughs and coughs. Tessa enters carrying a lantern.)

TESSA
Husband! Don't climb the scaffolding! It's a trick!

CALANDRINO (*offstage, above*)
Too late.

TESSA
No!

CALANDRINO (*offstage, above*)
But thank you for trying.

TESSA
(Attacking Bruno.)
You monster!

BRUNO

(To Tessa. Pointing to the shadow.)

There's the monster.

CALANDRINO *(offstage, above)*

Dear, don't. I'll beat him later.

SIMONE

(From the ground, clutching his chest.)

Help me. Take me home. I'm dying.

(Bruno goes to him. Helps him to his feet. They exit. Tessa looks up.)

TESSA

Sorry I was late.

CALANDRINO *(offstage, above)*

Um, could you bring up my clothes?

(She gathers his clothes and heads for the scaffolding. Blackout.)

ACT V. SCENE 3.

(Fresco: Simone's rooms. Night. Empty. The door rattles, then opens. Bruno enters, dragging a nearly lifeless Simone. He deposits him in a chair.)

BRUNO

Stop this. You're not dying. *(No response.)* I can't believe that a little matter of a bare, forked man knocked you out like this.

SIMONE

(Opening his eyes.)

It was no little matter.

BRUNO

Are you feeling better?

SIMONE

I'm dying.

BRUNO

You are not --

SIMONE

I am! (*Pause.*) It's okay. I'm ready. I've seen the future.

BRUNO

So have I.

SIMONE

What does your future look like?

BRUNO

It looks like chaos. It looks like a world where anyone with some asinine scheme, no matter how reckless, irreverent, or bombastic, will be rewarded and praised. Where rules are discarded in favor of individual whim, discipline is a lost art, and the foolish and the dangerous are allowed to speak their minds. Is that the future *you* see? *Is it!?*

SIMONE

(Starts a little.)

Huh? Oh. No. Well, that may be part of it. No, the future I see, that I saw tonight and one other time, is ... terrifying.

BRUNO

Then it's the same.

SIMONE

I see a world of license, of wild humanity, of great achievement.

BRUNO

Calandrino brought this on? What happened to your research? The man is the ultimate nincompoop.

SIMONE

He is easily taken.

BRUNO

That's right.

SIMONE

Like everyone else.

BRUNO

What?

SIMONE

My research is concluded. I've pursued a dead end. The question: Why are some so gullible? is moot. We are all fools.

BRUNO

All gullible? Not me. I gull; I am never gulled.

SIMONE

What you believe in, and the merchants, and the pope, what we all believe in, whatever it is, is a creation of our own imaginations. So we are all fools. The best we can do is try to create splendidly. Splendid, splendid lies. That's the future I see.

(Simone's eyes close. Bruno watches him. Simone's body slowly goes slack.)

BRUNO

Die, then. Who's stopping you?

(Bruno exits. Blackout.)

ACT V. SCENE 4.

(No fresco. Church scaffolding. Calandrino and Tessa, both naked, lie beneath her dress after making love. They remain silent for awhile.)

TESSA

We should go to the bishop. Tell him what happened. We should show him your drawings.

CALANDRINO

He won't need *us* to tell him what happened. It'll be all over town. I'll never get permission to paint it now. I'll have to keep working for Bruno and Buffalmacco.

TESSA

Those bastards!

CALANDRINO

I think ... paintings will get done.

TESSA

But you just said you'll never get --

CALANDRINO

Not by me. By someone. Sometime.

TESSA

What do you mean?

CALANDRINO

It's just a feeling I have. The idea has already been conceived. Now it'll grow, inside some large, invisible womb. And eventually, it'll be born.

(Tessa thinks about this and then remembers her ire.)

TESSA

Those bastards!

CALANDRINO

They were only playing a practical joke. It was funny.

(Tessa stews, then laughs.)

TESSA

You showed them, didn't you.

CALANDRINO

Showed them what?

TESSA

You know.

CALANDRINO

Oh, that. Well, I suppose they know everything now.

(They laugh together. Pause.)

TESSA

Husband?

CALANDRINO

Yes?

TESSA

You just gave me a child.

CALANDRINO

Just this instant?

Well, not *just* now. When we did it.

How do you know?

I can tell. I have a feeling. I'm not wrong.

He shall be named Angelo.

What?

Angelo. I like that name.

I don't like that name.

Why? What name do you like?

Michael. *(Thinks.)*

Michael?! Michaels are a *denaro* a dozen.

Oh, like no one else is named Angelo.

It's a heavenly name, Angelo!

Michael.

Angelo!

TESSA

CALANDRINO

TESSA

CALANDRINO

TESSA

CALANDRINO

TESSA

CALANDRINO

TESSA

CALANDRINO

TESSA

CALANDRINO

TESSA

CALANDRINO

TESSA

Michael!

CALANDRINO

Angelo!

(They glare, then turn away from each other. Pause.)

TESSA

What was the name of your apprentice?

CALANDRINO

The one who fell from this very scaffolding?

TESSA

Poor boy. He admired you, you know. I think he loved you. What was his name?

CALANDRINO

Hmm. Oh, I remember. Raphael.

TESSA

That's nice. *(Pause.)* But ... it's probably a girl.

CALANDRINO

You think so?

TESSA

The day will come, and we'll find out ... in time.

CALANDRINO

In time, we'll know.

TESSA

What we've brought into this world. *(Pause.)* Turn off that light.

(Calandrino blows out the lantern. Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

NOTE ON THE FRESCOES FOR ACT I, SCENE 3

The three fresco panels should resemble frescoes in mid-process. The dried, painted portions do not end in a straight line at the bottom, but follow some natural line of the design. Fresh plaster has been applied just below the painted portions of the first two panels, the bottom edge of the plaster again following some design element. Each plaster area defines a *giornata*, that which can be painted in one day. Below the fresh plaster is the outline of the rest of the design, painted in red, the *sinopia*. No fresh plaster has been applied to the third panel; its *sinopia* can be seen extending below the dry painted area. You can call or e-mail me if this isn't clear enough.