



THE BORGIA APOCALYPSE

THE SCREENPLAY

NEIL JORDAN

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Written by

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INTRODUCTION

I first wrote about the Borgias as an historical film. It was the second historical subject I had attempted – the first was Michael Collins, the film I made for Warner Brothers about the Irish guerrilla leader and the Irish War of Independence. On Michael Collins, I experienced the dilemma of the historical screenplay – the mass of material that has to be encapsulated within a two-hour time frame. So when Dreamworks suggested that I develop a Borgia project as a cable series for Showtime, I saw it as a unique opportunity to write a 40-hour film, about power, religion and sex in the Renaissance period. It would be as lurid and dramatic as any Jacobean drama, but over four seasons, long enough to do justice to the complexity of the times and the family.

Halfway through the shooting of the third season, I received word that the new regime at Showtime might not want to continue with the fourth. The series was expensive to produce, since we always did our utmost to do justice to the architecture, design and costume of the period, however free we allowed ourselves to be with the actual events. The ratings were steady, if not spectacular, but there was a large network of avid fans, who followed the machinations of the family, their loves, their losses, their tragedies with absolute devotion. As a compromise I proposed a two-hour film, which would bring the story of the family to a satisfactory and apocalyptic conclusion. For a variety of reasons, mainly cost, Showtime decided not to proceed with the two-hour film.

I am presenting this screenplay as an ebook to show those fans how the story they love so much would have concluded. Screenplays are not novels, not really even plays, they are like architectural sketches for an unconstructed city. But they do tell a story, through dialogue, and one of the great pleasures of writing *The Borgias* was the realisation that cable viewers and fans actually care about dialogue in a way that a cinema audience no longer does. This was a totally unexpected blessing to me as a writer, since I could return to the basic pleasure of words, and let the characters be defined, and refined, through the words they spoke.

So here we have the words. We don't have the pictures, the costumes, the actors, but the fans at least can read how I would have concluded the story. And since the most avid fan of the series was myself, I should state that I am available to direct this, should Showtime ever change their minds.

- **Neil Jordan**

INT. ALPHONSO'S PALACE. DAWN.

A pair of white-slipped feet walk up the magnificent staircase.

A servant girl comes down, with a pile of bloodied blankets in her hands.

She steps back and bows, in confusion.

SERVANT GIRL
Holiness...

It is the Pope of Rome.

INT. LUCREZIA'S BEDROOM. DAWN.

The dead and bloodied body of Alphonso on the bed. The Pope enters, in the deep background.

He looks at the scene, shocked. He takes Alphonso's dead wrist in his hand.

Then he falls to his knees, begins the prayer of Last Rites.

ALEXANDER
Requiscat in pacem...

And we hear a voice, O.S.

CESARE (O.S.)
Back the cart into the stable gates. We can't leave a trace of-

And as he enters, with Rufio, the Pope raises his head.

ALEXANDER
What is this?

He gestures to the bed.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
This outrage? This crime? This unholy mess?

CESARE
I can explain, Father –

Alexander looks down at the body. The blood everywhere. The wound.

ALEXANDER

No. No-one can explain this.

Cesare turns to Rufio.

CESARE

Leave us –

Alexander stands.

ALEXANDER

Are you to become your brother? Who in the end could not be trusted with a public whipping?

CESARE

Father, he assaulted me –

And Alexander hits him, open palmed, across the face.

ALEXANDER

And you, what? Did him to death? Our son in law? Under our protection? In the palace we provided for his safety?

CESARE

I will clean up this mess, father –

ALEXANDER

Oh yes, you will. Another body will be fished from the Tiber. Another drunkard arraigned for some night- time brawl. You will wash this palace clean of blood. And you will recall your manservant...

CESARE

Micheletto?

ALEXANDER

Who alone could be trusted with such matters.

CESARE

He doesn't speak to me. Of late.

ALEXANDER

Well then. Get him to speak to me...

INT. THE BORGIA VILLA. DAWN.

Lucrezia, in a bath. She is being bathed by her mother, Vanozza.

LUCREZIA

Take me out of here, mother.

VANOZZA

You would leave me here alone?

LUCREZIA

I am afraid of him now. The one I love most in the world.

VANOZZA

He would never harm a hair on your head.

LUCREZIA

No. But he would harm others. Anyone I come close to is doomed.

She begins to cry.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)

Have we become the family from hell, mother?

VANOZZA

Perhaps. Since we were given the keys of Heaven.

LUCREZIA

I need to hide. Until I gather my thoughts again. My spirits. You must know a nunnery. That can hide a troubled soul.

VANOZZA

There are many. And there is only one way to get you safely there.

INT. SHABBY ROOM. PAPAL BARRACKS. DAY.

The body of Alphonso, laid out on a wooden trestle. Rufio is there, with two rough henchmen.

Cesare enters.

CESARE

He was a drunkard, you understand?

RUFIO

We do my Lord.

Cesare pulls a knife.

CESARE
And an incompetent brawler.

He stabs the body of the dead Alphonso.

CESARE (CONT'D)
In a fight over a tavern whore –

He stabs the body many times.

CESARE (CONT'D)
They stabbed him like a wine bag-

He stabs it one last time.

CESARE (CONT'D)
Till he could bleed no more.

He turns.

CESARE (CONT'D)
Now dump him in the Tiber –

EXT. TIBER. NIGHT.

Rufio slips in the body of Alphonso.

INT. BORGIA VILLA GARDENS. NIGHT.

Lucrezia there, dressed in a nun's costume.

Vanozza enters through the back door, and a familiar figure comes behind her.

Micheletto.

MICHELETTO
I would not have taken this summons from anyone but you.

LUCREZIA
And this is true, mother.

VANOZZA
On your child's life, it is...

The boy now is led into the gardens.

MICHELETTO
May I?

When Lucrezia nods he takes him in his arms.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)
And you will tell me where we are headed?

VANOZZA
A nunnery, south of here.

Micheletto tweaks the child's cheek.

MICHELETTO
This boy? Among nuns?

VANOZZA
No. Giovanni will stay with me.

EXT. NUNNERY. DAY.

A convent, situated amongst rolling hills.

Micheletto leads Lucrezia towards it.

LUCREZIA
You will stay with us?

MICHELETTO
It is a nunnery, my lady. I cannot.

LUCREZIA
But I will be safe here?

MICHELETTO
No word of where you are shall pass my lips.

LUCREZIA
Even if my brother demands it?

MICHELETTO
I have not seen your brother. For months now.

LUCREZIA

But my father has summoned you, no? And when the Pope summons, even you must attend?

INT. CONFESSIONAL. NIGHT.

The Pope, sitting alone in his confessional. A figure slips in on the other side of the booth.

Micheletto.

MICHELETTO

I cannot beg for forgiveness, Holiness –

ALEXANDER

Why not?

MICHELETTO

Because my sins are numberless. And you are asking me to resume this life of... crime...

ALEXANDER

I am asking you to serve as manservant to the Gonfaliere of the Pope of Rome...

MICHELETTO

I killed one dear to me in your son's service. It left me with a wound that is hard to heal.

ALEXANDER

Pray to God then to salve that wound. And put yourself in His service once more...

MICHELETTO

God does not speak to me of late. If He has ever...

ALEXANDER

He hears the pleas of all, Micheletto. Even one who must serve Him in the shadows, like you.

MICHELETTO

Ah. So the knife and the garotte are part of God's plan?

ALEXANDER

We rule God's kingdom for Him, Micheletto. His enemies wield those weapons. And sometimes so must we.

MICHELETTO

I will not be serving God, Holiness. I will be serving your son, Cesare Borgia.

ALEXANDER

And he needs you. He misses you.

On Micheletto's face. He misses Cesare as well.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
He is weaker, in your absence.

INT. VATICAN PALACE. DAY.

The French ambassador, before the Pope, in full ceremonial mode. Cesare stands behind the Pope, as a kind of consigliere.

FRENCH AMBASSADOR
King Louis of France is already on his way, Your Holiness.

ALEXANDER
More French armies? This is all that Rome needs.

FRENCH AMBASSADOR
He comes in peace, as your Holiness well knows. He would swear eternal loyalty to Rome, to God and his Pope. And he would discuss with you the troubled issue of Naples.

ALEXANDER
Are the French slow learners? Did the last invasion of Naples teach them nothing?

CESARE
Father –

ALEXANDER
Oh of course. We have a grander design here. We restructure Italy between us. Is that the game?

FRENCH AMBASSADOR
I am not party to the king's deeper intent –

ALEXANDER
A pity. We enjoy such games. And have proven rather adept at them, in the past –

FRENCH AMBASSADOR
In fact, Your Holiness, I must now say a goodbye of kinds. I must relinquish my post.

ALEXANDER
Your name again?

FRENCH AMBASSADOR
Archbishop D'Ambroise, ambassador to the French King.

ALEXANDER

Of course. You are to join us here. As cardinal. From the frying pan into the fire. And your successor?

FRENCH AMBASSADOR

I have not been graced with his name, Your Holiness –

INT. CESARE'S QUARTERS. DAY.

Cesare in a bath, being attended by some man or woman servant. His father stands in the background.

ALEXANDER

So. Another Neapolitan invasion. This time with our compliance.

CESARE

We must ride the dragon of events, father.

ALEXANDER

The dragon of events. Does he breathe fire? The Spanish will be breathing fire, when they get wind of it.

A figure appears behind the Pope. Micheletto. Cesare doesn't know he is there.

The Pope holds a hand up, to make sure Micheletto keeps quiet.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Though if we offered to divide the kingdom..

CESARE

Naples? Ruled by Spain and France?

ALEXANDER

Stranger alliances have happened. And it would keep them off our backs. Occupied, so to speak, in the Neapolitan swamp.

The Pope turns, and puts a finger to his lips. He tiptoes out, leaving Micheletto there, looking at Cesare's broad back.

Cesare keeps the conversation going.

CESARE

It would be a sweet revenge, would it not? Their king deposed? Or can we hope for his hanging?

MICHELETTO

We can hope.

Cesare turns.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)
You see I know him of old.

Micheletto gives a half smile.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)
As I know you?

CESARE
You would surprise me, my friend? Naked, like this?

He stands out of the bath.

CESARE (CONT'D)
Then you must embrace me.

Micheletto walks forwards and embraces him.

CESARE (CONT'D)
What brought you back?

MICHELETTO
Your father. The game.

CESARE
You have been away too long...

INT. CHAPEL. NUNNERY. DAY.

Lucrezia and Pia, a young demure nun, are scrubbing the floor in the chapel.

PIA
Take care, between the cracks, sister –

She looks at Lucrezia.

LUCREZIA
I told you. I have not yet taken vows.

PIA
Yet everyone has a name. A name they were born with, one they adopt.

LUCREZIA

I shall become... sister Angela...

PIA

Good. I can call you that.

LUCREZIA

The Reverend Mother examines between the tiles, then?

PIA

Yes. With her fingernail. And any dirt will be punished-

LUCREZIA

With a whipping?

PIA

She does not whip, but her words are worse than any lash.

And Lucrezia scrubs fiercely.

LUCREZIA

My crack then shall be cleaner than yours - ever was -

Pia smiles nervously. And we do not know if she gets the pun.

INT. CASTEL ST ANGELO. DAY.

Catherina Sforza, asleep on her plain bed. She looks up in amazement, at something out of shot.

BY THE BARS OF HER PRISON -

A white-gloved hand stretches in, with a ring, inviting a kiss.

CATHERINA

You will have to have my legs broken, Holiness. If you want to see me kneel.

ALEXANDER

A kiss might suffice.

CATHERINA

A kiss?

ALEXANDER

Rather than a genuflection.

We see Alexander now, in the flickering torchlight.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Your legendary beauty is fading in here. It is starved of daylight. It pains us to see such a wonder be so reduced.

CATHERINA

Send me home then.

ALEXANDER

Without a formal surrender? Without a pledge of eternal service to the Pope of Rome?

CATHERINA

Without me kneeling...

ALEXANDER

That is impossible, I am afraid.

CATHERINA

Not only must I be defeated, I must be seen to be defeated.

ALEXANDER

And the whole world must see it.

CATHERINA

But the whole world knows, Your Holiness. My lands have been seized, my castle ravished, my body...

ALEXANDER

Your body ravished? By whom?

CATHERINA

Well, your son had his way with it some time ago. But then I also took my pleasures on his...

ALEXANDER

So he confessed.

CATHERINA

To you?

She smiles.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

How intimate...

ALEXANDER
We share most things.

And she is beginning to see an opening.

CATHERINA
So I have heard.

She walks closer to the bars.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)
Might I suggest, Holiness?

ALEXANDER
Yes?

CATHERINA
You have tried brute force. You have tried chains, prison walls, and none have made me kneel to you.
What you have not yet tried is. . .

She brings her lips close to the bars.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)
Kindness.

ALEXANDER
Kindness?

CATHERINA
A soft word. A gentle touch, can often achieve what the whip and the rack cannot.

ALEXANDER
Ah...

He touches her lips with his hand.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
We could unlock that indomitable heart, with just a word or two?

CATHERINA
Perhaps.

ALEXANDER
Well, let us put it to the test. Perhaps you could join us for supper, some days hence.

CATHERINA
Still in chains?

ALEXANDER
And if words can melt you, we will do our best to find them.

EXT. BALCONY. VATICAN. DAY.

A balcony overlooking the gardens. Micheletto and Cesare.

CESARE
So my father's pleas carry more weight than mine?

MICHELETTO
It was time. And he made me realise. I am weaker without you. As are you, without me.

CESARE
Did you explain your absence to him?

MICHELETTO
You had me kill one I loved.

CESARE
I had you kill one that played with you. And me.

MICHELETTO
Still...it scared me...

CESARE
Where?

Micheletto takes Cesare's hand and places it on his heart.

MICHELETTO
Here.

CESARE
So. You have a heart?

MICHELETTO
Not anymore.

CESARE
Ah, so you are fit for service once again?

Micheletto glances down into the gardens, where we can see Rufio, waiting.

MICHELETTO
Is there still room for me?

CESARE
For one I trust such as you? Of course.

MICHELETTO
And you trust him?

Cesare smiles.

CESARE
So far.

MICHELETTO
You shouldn't.

CESARE
Prove it to me then. Why I shouldn't. And we will be as one, once more.

Cesare embraces him.

CESARE (CONT'D)
Come. Meet your... other...

MICHELETTO
Must I?

CESARE
Yes. Things have changed here. Greatly.

INT. CELL IN NUNNERY. NIGHT.

Pia, dressing for bed. As she takes off her bonnet, we see her hair is shorn.

Lucrezia takes off her bonnet, but keeps white wimple on underneath.

PIA
You sleep with your wimple –

LUCREZIA
Yes. As I did last night. And the night before that –

PIA
Does the Reverend Mother know?

LUCREZIA
Not unless you tell her.

PIA
There are rules here, that govern every minute of our day. And we are sworn to keep them –

LUCREZIA
Well can you keep a secret then?

Pia stares at her.

PIA
Yes.

Lucrezia comes close to her. Almost lip to lip.

LUCREZIA
Promise?

PIA
I shouldn't, but I do.

LUCREZIA
I obey no rules.

She takes off her wimple, and her beautiful hair spreads down around her shoulders.

Pia gasps. As if she has never seen such beauty.

PIA
You are not a nun. Not even a novitiate?

Lucrezia smiles.

LUCREZIA
I am serving penance.

PIA
What penance?

LUCREZIA
The penance of Sappho.

PIA
Sappho?

LUCREZIA
Yes. She made the mistake of loving a woman.

PIA
A woman?

LUCREZIA
A long time ago. On the island of Lesbos.

Lucrezia lies down on her hard bed.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)
But when my penance is done, my father has promised. To take me back. To barter me in marriage,
like any other child bearing beast of burden.

PIA
I would rather be a nun, sister Angela.

LUCREZIA
And some nights, sister Pia, so would I.

EXT. GARDEN. NIGHT.

Cesare approaches Rufio, with Micheletto.

CESARE
Rufio. Meet my Micheletto.

They look at each other and nod.

CESARE (CONT'D)
You know each other?

RUFIO
I have heard of him.

Cesare looks at Micheletto.

CESARE
And you?

Micheletto slowly shakes his head. Rufio holds out his hand.

RUFIO
You are a legend.

MICHELETTO
Ah. Where?

RUFIO
Throughout the whole of Italy. Wherever men fight.

Micheletto shakes Rufio's hand.

MICHELETTO
You were Catherina Sforza's man...

RUFIO
I was.

MICHELETTO
And you can change allegiance so easily? From Florence to Rome?

RUFIO
She is the past. He is... the future...

Micheletto looks from Cesare to Rufio.

MICHELETTO
And long may he remain so.

INT. CASTEL ST ANGELO. DAY.

Adriana, the servant girl, washes Catherina Sforza's hair.

CATHERINA
My confinement is improving.

ADRIANA
Is it?

CATHERINA
It must be, if they allow you to wash my hair.

She takes a dead louse from the water.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

But it will never end.

ADRIANA

They cannot keep you here forever.

CATHERINA

Oh yes they can. And will. Among rats and lice.

She takes Adriana's hand in hers.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

The Pope sent you, did he not? As a peace offering, of kinds?

ADRIANA

I was told to do whatever would make you comfortable...

CATHERINA

And give His Holiness a message from me then, will you?

ADRIANA

He so rarely speaks to me.

CATHERINA

But I am sure you can find a way.

She brings the hand to her cheek.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

Tell him, when he asks after my comforts, that I would happily dine with him. But only if I can make myself presentable...

ADRIANA

Presentable?

CATHERINA

Hair washed and curled. Face and lips with all of the necessary unguents. I would be beautiful again, if only for one night... For him...

INT. VATICAN GARDENS. DAY.

Adriana hurries past the Pope, eyes downcast.

ALEXANDER

You girl –

ADRIANA
Holiness –

ALEXANDER
How is our charge?

When Adriana is afraid to answer, he interjects.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
Catherina Sforza?

ADRIANA
She is sad, Your Holiness.

ALEXANDER
Of course. Wouldn't you be? In chains?

ADRIANA
But she told me she would happily dine with you. If she could make herself presentable.

ALEXANDER
Indeed? Could this tigress at last be in the process of being tamed?

He considers.

ADRIANA
She would be beautiful again, if only for one night... for you...

ALEXANDER
Touching, indeed.

ADRIANA
Have I then your Holiness' permission to supply her with all of the necessary comforts?

ALEXANDER
You have indeed. Whatever she needs.

INT. CELL IN NUNNERY. NIGHT.

Pia, asleep in bed. Then her innocent shorn head suddenly shivers, as if from a nightmare. She sits bolt upwards.

Lucrezia wakes.

LUCREZIA

What is it?

PIA

I cannot keep your secret.

LUCREZIA

Why not?

PIA

I dreamt of the fires of hell. They burnt my clothes. What is left of my hair. I have sworn to hide no detail of our lives from our Reverend Mother. I cannot swear a lie. . .

LUCREZIA

Can I let you in on a secret, Pia?

PIA

What?

LUCREZIA

She already knows.

PIA

She does?

LUCREZIA

My father, who would have me marry some fat merchant for some bagful of coins is a benefactor of this place.

Pia lays her head back down.

PIA

And now I cannot sleep.

LUCREZIA

You can smell the sulphur? Of the fires of hell?

PIA

And I miss my mother.

LUCREZIA

Come here.

PIA

Over to you?

LUCREZIA

Yes. Let me be mother. Tonight.

And Pia rises, comes over the Lucrezia's bed. She crawls in underneath the poor blanket.

PIA

Thank you –

LUCREZIA

You are far too young to have fled the nest, little Pia –

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE CELL. NUNNERY. NIGHT.

A harsh looking nun with a stick prowls the corridors. Her name is sister Benvenuta. She looks in each barred window as she goes.

*She stops at their cell. POV - SISTER BENVENUTA -
Lucrezia's long hair spilling down. Little Pia in her arms.*

INT. CASTEL ST ANGELO. DAY.

Catherina Sforza writes out the equivalent of a shopping list.

CATHERINA

A bleach, for the hair. For the face, a mixture of mercury and vermilion. Though if my skin were any paler, it would probably fade away. And for the lips, a salve that a former servant of mine knows of.

She scribbles a note.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

But this note is for him, alone. For his eyes only.

Adriana looks at the note.

ADRIANA

Rufio?

CATHERINA

Currently in the Duke Valentino's employ.

INT. RUFIO'S APARTMENTS. NIGHT.

Rufio, with Adriana. He examines Catherina's note.

RUFIO
Who wrote this note?

ADRIANA
The lady Catherina. She dines with the Pope tomorrow. She would look her best.

RUFIO
One last time, perhaps.

He looks at her.

RUFIO (CONT'D)
And who else knows of this request?

ADRIANA
No-one, my Lord.

RUFIO
It is unusual, to say the least.

ADRIANA
She wanted a salve.

RUFIO
A lip-balm.

ADRIANA
And you have such a thing?

RUFIO
And what, may I ask is the occasion?

ADRIANA
She dines with the Pope, tomorrow.

RUFIO
God bless her.

He smiles to himself.

RUFIO (CONT'D)
Come back in the morning. I will have it then.

INT. RUFIO'S APARTMENTS. DAWN.

Rufio hands Adriana a small glass container.

RUFIO
For her lips, only...

INT. CASTEL ST ANGELO. EVENING.

Catherina, in her cell, applying her make-up. Adriana helps her.

Micheletto walks by, behind the bars.

MICHELETTO
You dine with the pope tonight, my Lady.

CATHERINA
I had hoped to. Has His Holiness changed his mind?

MICHELETTO
Not at all. His Holiness has sent me to escort you to your carriage.

CATHERINA
That is a privilege, indeed. A carriage...

As Adriana finishes with her face-paint, she reaches for the bottle Rufio gave to her.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)
No, my dear. Don't touch. Allow me...

She takes the bottle, and applies the salve carefully to her lips.

Checks herself in whatever is there of the mirror. Turns to Micheletto.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)
How do I look?

MICHELETTO
A vision.

CATHERINA
Thank you. And if you would be so kind as to release me. . . for the evening, at least. . .

Micheletto nods to the jailor, who begins to open the locks on the doors.

INT. VATICAN. GRAND STAIRCASE. NIGHT.

Micheletto walks, with Catherina on his arm, up the grand staircase.

A figure appears. Cesare Borgia.

CESARE
My Lady.

CATHERINA
My Lord. You are to dine with us?

CESARE
Sadly, no. But let me escort you from here.

She removes her arm from Micheletto's, and takes Cesare's.

CATHERINA
For old times sake.

CESARE
Indeed. Old times.

As they walk upwards.

CESARE (CONT'D)
Will my father be safe, alone with you?

CATHERINA
Were you safe?

CESARE
Hardly.

CATHERINA
Perhaps the hint of danger is what excites His Holiness.

CESARE
I am sure of it.

At the top of the staircase. He pushes her into an alcove. Brings his lips close to hers.

CESARE (CONT'D)
No tricks, Catherina.

CATHERINA
I have no tricks left. Alas.

She looks into his eyes.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)
Would you kiss me, my Lord?

CESARE
Not tonight.

CATHERINA
Again, alas.

CESARE
That may be my father's pleasure. Your lips, on his ring.

CATHERINA
I believe that is the point of this exercise.

He leads her on.

CESARE
Come then.

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

The Pope at the door of an elaborate dining room, beautifully set.

Cesare emerges into view, with Catherina on his arm.

ALEXANDER
Catherina Sforza.

CATHERINA
It is no-one else.

The Pope moves towards her.

ALEXANDER
And the pleasure is ours. Tonight.

He takes her arm.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Thank you, my son...

INT. CASTEL ST ANGELO. NIGHT.

Though it is always night in here. Micheletto walks through, alone, looks at Catherina's empty cell.

And he hears a sound, which alarms him. The squealing of a rat.

He looks in the bars. He sees a rat, by the discarded vial of salve, bleeding from the mouth.

He rattles the doors, alarmed.

MICHELETTO
Guards!!! Guards!!!

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

The Pope hands Catherina a glass of wine. They stand overlooking the Roman evening.

ALEXANDER
Rome can be beautiful on an autumn evening.

CATHERINA
Your view is better than mine Holiness. All I see of an evening are damp walls and cobwebs.

ALEXANDER
Not quite the same.

CATHERINA
But must I suffer that view indefinitely, Your Holiness?

ALEXANDER
Perhaps the answer is up to you, Catherina Sforza.

INT. CASTEL ST ANGELO. NIGHT.

The guards come running. Open the door for Micheletto.

He runs inside the cell, and rummages through the straw. He finds a dying rat, beside the vial of salve Rufio gave Adriana.

MICHELETTO

And he runs.

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Catherina and the Pope.

CATHERINA

I have knelt only once, Holiness. Of my own free will.

ALEXANDER

So. If it is your will to kneel now, perhaps your freedom can be assured.

CATHERINA

And is that all I must do, Holiness? Kneel?

ALEXANDER

Kneel. Kiss this ring. Swear eternal obedience to the Pope of Rome.

She looks at him. Holding the glass between two delicate fingers.

CATHERINA

So. You have won. I finally declare myself...

She drops the glass. It smashes on the floor.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

Beaten.

She kneels, beside the broken glass.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

This is me, kneeling.

She takes his hand. Kisses the papal ring.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

This is me, kissing the papal ring.

EXT. CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

Micheletto, running up the enormous staircase. He calls out for Cesare.

MICHELETTO
My Lord –

A servant emerges.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)
Find Cesare Borgia – now –

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

The Pope, with Catherina kneeling before him. She raises her glistening lips from his ring.

CATHERINA
This is me, having kissed...

ALEXANDER
The papal ring? Is that all those lips would grace?

CATHERINA
You are a seducer of legend, Holiness. But...

ALEXANDER
No more than you –

EXT. CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

Micheletto reaches Cesare.

MICHELETTO
Where are they My Lord – there was a poisoned salve – a lip-balm –

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Catherina rises, brings her lips close to the pope's.

CATHERINA
They have tasted Borgia lips before. But the son's. Not the father's.

ALEXANDER
Youth before age.

CATHERINA
But if the son's vigour is anything to go by, the father should be –

And the doors crash open behind them. Catherina looks round, in confusion.

Cesare is there.

CESARE
Father – GET OUT – NOW –

INT. CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

The anguished howl of Catherina Sforza echoes through the Vatican. Micheletto listens.

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Catherina Sforza is on the floor, straddled by Cesare Borgia. He is cutting off her lips.

CESARE
Those poisoned lips, father – were designed to kill you both-

As he continues with his gruesome task.

CESARE (CONT'D)
But, my love, I have determined you shall live. Lipless you shall live.

INT. STAIRS. RUFIO'S QUARTERS. NIGHT.

Micheletto, with three or four henchmen, thunder up the stairs.

INT. ROOMS. RUFIO'S QUARTERS. NIGHT.

Rufio, serving himself a bowl of gruel. He hears the thundering of feet outside.

He dashes to the windows, as the doors crash in. Climbs onto a balcony, outside.

EXT. MICHELETTO'S QUARTERS. NIGHT.

Rufio leaps through the air and lands on the pavement. Then he finds four swords drawn, jammed into his gullet.

He looks into the eyes of Cesare Borgia.

CESARE
So. I was the future, was I not?

RUFIO
You are still, my Lord.

CESARE
A harsh future.

They lead him off.

INT. CESARE'S QUARTERS. DAY.

Cesare, facing Rufio. Micheletto sits watching. The young Adriana is brought in before them.

CESARE
You can speak freely. I guarantee you will come to no harm.

ADRIANA
The lady Sforza sent me to his rooms. She gave me a note for him. I know not what it said.

CESARE
It doesn't matter what it said. What did he give you?

ADRIANA
He told me to return in the morning. He gave me a bottle of salve.

CESARE
Salve?

ADRIANA
I was told it was salve. For her lips.

MICHELETTO
You said a bottle. Was it this bottle?

He holds up the bottle. Adriana nods, nervously. Cesare smiles at her.

CESARE
You can leave us now.

And she does. Cesare looks from Micheletto to Rufio.

RUFIO
Kill me now.

CESARE
Not now.

RUFIO

Oh. The tedious business of the lash. The strappado. It just takes time, my Lord. Much simpler to kill me now.

CESARE
Why did you do it?

RUFIO
I was sworn to you, my Lord. Never to your father. And my mistress would have died the way she lived. I could not deny her that opportunity.

CESARE
The pity is, I had thought you were cleverer than that.

RUFIO
We all have our weaknesses. She was, and always will be, mine.

CESARE
So. You shall die in her presence then.

RUFIO
How?

MICHELETTO
Can I make a proposal, my Lord?

CESARE
Be my guest.

MICHELETTO
He is a legend. His reputation matches mine. Let us kill the legend, before he dies.

CESARE
And how do we do that?

MICHELETTO
Single combat. Between me and him. In the Castel St Angelo. Before his mistresses eyes...

Micheletto looks to Cesare.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)
She still has eyes, no?

EXT. GATES OF ROME/ST PETER'S. DAY.

The French King enters, in magnificent ceremony, through the gates. Trumpets sound, as the

retinue passes through. And among his retinue is a cowled figure, dressed in seemingly Franciscan garb...

INT. VATICAN PALACE. DAY.

The French King, with his retinue, before the Pope of Rome with his, his son Cesare amongst them.

KING LOUIS

So your family's ties with Naples have been severed.

ALEXANDER

Sadly. Our daughter's husband turned out the worst of his Neapolitan kind. A drunkard, an ingratiate, a tavern brawler.

KING LOUIS

And you, your Holiness, have no more allegiance to that treacherous kingdom?

Alexander looks to Cesare, who replies for him.

CESARE

Our hearts have long been set on the French alliance.

KING LOUIS

So you will at last support our legitimate claims on Naples?

ALEXANDER

You must tell us then, what Naples is faced with?

KING LOUIS

Surrender to us freely. Or suffer a conquest. The choice is theirs.

ALEXANDER

Which is why, we presume, you brought an army with you?

KING LOUIS

To bolster the forces we have already loaned your son. Yes.

ALEXANDER

Spain makes a similar claim to the Kingdom of Naples.

KING LOUIS

But Spain has no army in Rome. That we are aware of.

ALEXANDER

Who knows what armies are on their way here, Your Highness? One invading force disturbs the sleep of Italy. Two might give her nightmares...

KING LOUIS

We are aware of Your Holiness' ties to his ancestral homeland...

ALEXANDER

So, you will appreciate our concern here. To maintain some balance...

He holds out both hands, like weighting scales.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Between the conflicting claims on Naples...

KING LOUIS

And we suspect His Holiness may in his infinite wisdom provide a solution.

He bows, graciously.

ALEXANDER

Indeed. One has already been mooted, with your departing ambassador.

KING LOUIS

Yes, we have been so informed.

ALEXANDER

French arms are free to invade
Naples if, and only if –

KING LOUIS

They hold it in His Holiness' name. And they share the spoils of conquest with the Holy See and her Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella.

ALEXANDER

And?

KING LOUIS

We respectfully agree. In principle. And we shall leave any issues of discord to be resolved by our new ambassador to the Holy See.

ALEXANDER

You have appointed a new ambassador? Already?

KING LOUIS

Forgive me Holiness. Let me now introduce him.

He claps his hands. And a cowled figure from the French contingent steps forward.

KING LOUIS (CONT'D)

The new French ambassador to the Holy See.

The cowled figure steps forwards.

The cowled figure kneels before the Pope. And slips the cowl from his head.

KING LOUIS (CONT'D)

Cardinal Giuliano Della Rovere.

The Pope stares at the unblinking eyes of Della Rovere. And he finally manages to mutter.

ALEXANDER

Cardinal.

DELLA ROVERE

Holiness.

And the Pope looks left, at the sound of a sword being drawn.

ALEXANDER

Cesare –

Cesare stops his sword-hand. The French King smiles, diplomatically.

KING LOUIS

The ambassador will reside here under our protection, under full diplomatic immunity.

And the pope stretches forward his hand, with the ring to be kissed.

ALEXANDER

You may kiss the ring of St
Peter...

DELLA ROVERE

Once more. Gladly. And, humbly...

INT. VESTIBULE. DAY.

The vestier tries to remove the Pope's clothes. Cesare interrupts him.

CESARE
Leave us –

And he begins to remove the Pope's ceremonial garments.

CESARE (CONT'D)
Do you think he knows? Of your plan of succession?

The Pope, staring at himself in the mirror, shakes his head.

ALEXANDER
Not unless you have shared it –

CESARE
Never.

ALEXANDER
No. But he is clever, as always. He knows every Pope's days are numbered. Comes back to his old haunt under full public view. Has no scruples. Knows he is untouchable. With his coffers no doubt funded to buy sufficient votes.

The Pope smiles at his reflection.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
On reflection, he would make an excellent Pope.

CESARE
And how do we outplay him, father?

ALEXANDER
We do what we have always done, my son. We survive.

EXT. ST PETER'S. DAY.

As Della Rovere descends the steps, surrounded by French soldiers, he comes face to face with Cesare, and a band of his forces.

CESARE
Cardinal.

DELLA ROVERE
My Lord. I would remind you I am under French protection.

CESARE
These men are French. So, consider yourself under my protection too.

DELLA ROVERE

Double the protection. I am most re- assured.

CESARE

May I walk with you?

DELLA ROVERE

To my palace? Indeed.

CESARE

You have a palace already?

DELLA ROVERE

Since my own has long been requisitioned, yes, I found myself in need of one.

As they walk, Cesare whispers.

CESARE

I should have killed you a year ago.

DELLA ROVERE

Yes. You should have. But your words were, if I recall... "I do not intend you to be dead. For a very long time".

CESARE

So we must breathe each other's air now?

DELLA ROVERE

Yes. It will be most... invigorating. And if I am found poisoned, garrotted, stabbed, beheaded, there will be consequences. Of a geo-political nature.

CESARE

So your health is secured, then.

DELLA ROVERE

I have always enjoyed good health, thanks be to God.

CESARE

And long may it continue.

DELLA ROVERE

But as I told you then, when you threatened me with a most painful future, you should consider your own.

CESARE
My health?

DELLA ROVERE
And your future. Your father, even with the blessing of the Most High, cannot live forever.

CESARE
I think my future is secure.

DELLA ROVERE
With your armies? They are the gift of France. And of the church itself. With your allies? Allies can bend with the prevailing wind. As we both so well know.

CESARE
So I should parlay with the one who would succeed my father?

DELLA ROVERE
If your future is to be truly secure.

CESARE
I am a warrior, cardinal. I live and breathe the air of battle. I need it for a tonic, an elixir. I need it, dare I say it, to keep alive. And I have no doubt it will kill me some day.

DELLA ROVERE
So you will enjoy the siege of Naples, then?

CESARE
If it doesn't last forever...

INT. CASTEL ST ANGELO. DAY.

The cavernous central vault of the Castel St Angelo.

Rufio sits in a cell with Catherina Sforza, who looks like a death's head now, teeth exposed, with her lips missing.

A jangle of chains and a series of doors open, off.

Rufio smiles at Catherina Sforza. And we see he has a razor-blade clenched, hidden between his teeth.

Micheletto enters the central vault, stripped to the waist. Cesare behind him, a phalanx of soldiers behind him.

Every prisoner behind bars now stands to attention.

MICHELETTO

Unchain him.

Guards run to unchain Rufio. And as he is unchained, the prisoners begin baying for blood.

Cesare raises his arms, and finds silence.

CESARE

The rules are simple.

He looks around as silence descends.

CESARE (CONT'D)

There are none.

CESARE (CONT'D)

One blade each.

Micheletto begins wrapping his left arm in a rag. Cesare throws a blade at his feet.

Another blade at the feet of Rufio.

CESARE (CONT'D)

And one winner.

The two blades, stuck in the sand. Rufio walks forwards and grips his.

And as Micheletto bends for his, Rufio rushes him. The crowd bays for blood.

Micheletto, gripping his blade, pivots on his left arm. He kicks the feet from under Rufio, sending him spinning into the sand.

Catherina gasps, through her exposed teeth. Rufio tumbles to the bars of an adjacent cage.

And as he turns to right himself, Micheletto is on him. His blade headed straight for his jugular.

Rufio feints, catches the blade on his forearm. He tumbles to release himself.

But the first blood is Micheletto's.

And they now circle each other like cats. Blood is streaming from Rufio's forearm.

One jab, then another. Neither hits home.

Micheletto bends low as he approaches, and surreptitiously sweeps a handful of dust from the floor.

He waits for Rufio to lunge, and when he ducks to avoid his knife, throws the dust in his eyes.

Rufio tumbles to the floor, momentarily blinded. And Micheletto comes in for the kill.

Rufio manages to swing sideways though, and blindly stabs at Micheletto's torso.

His knife embeds itself to the hilt in Micheletto's calf. But he loses grip of the hilt.

As he clears the dust from his eyes, he raises his head to see, appalled...

Micheletto. Standing. One knife sticking from his calf. The other in his sword-hand.

Micheletto grimaces, and pulls the knife from his calf with his left hand.

He now has two knives.

And Rufio is seemingly defenceless.

MICHELETTO

Too simple...

Blood is streaming from his calf, but he hardly seems to notice.

Micheletto circles Rufio, both knives aloft. He clucks at him, like a chicken.

The prisoners bay for him to finish it, go in for the kill.

But Micheletto plays him like a cat. Draws stripes of blood across his chest.

And finally goes for it. Leaps upon him, both knives aloft. Rufio grips his descending wrists. Stops the knives. But falls backwards towards the ground, with the effort.

And both knives are now bearing down towards his throat. He twists his body beneath Micheletto.

And the situation is now reversed. Micheletto, both knives pointing upwards, as Rufio presses his wrists downwards.

Micheletto's arms shake with the effort. Every muscle bulges.

And Rufio finally bears the blade, hidden between his teeth.

He slashes downwards with it at Micheletto's neck.

Micheletto gasps. Blood spouts from the wound in his neck. Into Rufio's eyes.

Who is momentarily, once more, blinded. And Micheletto frees his wrists.

Brings both knives slamming, fatally, into Rufio's neck. The crowd bays its approval.

Rufio staggers to his feet. Two knife-hilts jutting from his neck, on either side.

Micheletto staggers also to his feet. His hand holds the wound on his neck, staunching the blood.

And Rufio falls to his knees. Then, backwards, his face to the cavernous ceiling. He dies, with the blade still clenched between his teeth.

Micheletto bends down towards him. He removes the blade from his teeth.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)

Clever.

Cesare walks towards him.

CESARE

So one legend dies.

He wraps gauze around his neck wound.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Another lives.

INT. CESARE'S QUARTERS. NIGHT.

Micheletto on some kind of trestle table. Cesare attends his wounds, cleaning them and binding them.

CESARE

I would attend your wounds myself, my friend.

MICHELETTO

Thank you.

CESARE

And tell you I am sorry, for the wound I caused you.

MICHELETTO

It is forgotten.

As Cesare cleans the wound on his neck...

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)
Should we not be bound for Naples?

CESARE
You know how slowly armies march. I have sent our forces ahead of us. We can join them, for the siege. Take the shorter route.

MICHELETTO
There will be a siege?

CESARE
King Louis loves a siege.

Cesare takes a knife.

CESARE (CONT'D)
There is some grit in this wound. It could fester.

Micheletto grimaces.

CESARE (CONT'D)
And there is the matter of my sister. Her whereabouts.

Cesare turns the knife. Micheletto grimaces further.

MICHELETTO
She swore me to secrecy, my Lord.

CESARE
So you know. Where she is.

MICHELETTO
Yes. I could not lie to you. I know where she is. But I can never tell you. No matter how you worry that wound.

Cesare extracts the blade. There is a piece of metal on it.

CESARE
There's the culprit.

He dips the blade in water.

CESARE (CONT'D)
But you can swear to me that she is safe.

MICHELETTO

She is safe, my Lord. I swear it.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. MT. VESUVIUS. DAY.

Cesare, riding through a blasted landscape, on the foothills of Vesuvius. He is with Micheletto and a platoon of soldiers. He comes upon fields of dead cattle, by a yellow brackish river.

A peasant there, tending the last living calf. Cesare stops his horse.

CESARE

What sickness is this?

PEASANT

Bad luck. The gasses from Vesuvius infect the river. The cattle drink. They die.

CESARE

So that yellow river is infected?

PEASANT

Poisoned. Find a fresh well to drink from.

EXT. WALLS OF NAPLES. EVENING.

Cesare rides, with Micheletto, through the encamped French army outside the gates of Naples.

INT. FRENCH KING'S TENT. NIGHT.

Cesare, Micheletto, the French King and his generals.

CESARE

You are patient, you French.

KING LOUIS

We value our troops.

CESARE

Too highly, perhaps.

KING LOUIS

We can be patient. We French are masters of the long siege. Starve them into weakness. Then attack.

CESARE

When? In winter?

KING LOUIS

A depleted populace is always easier to conquer. And it takes time.

CESARE

What if I could deplete the populace in a week or less?

KING LOUIS

And how would you achieve that?

CESARE

I have my ways.

KING LOUIS

Some necromancy? Some alchemy?

CESARE

Perhaps.

KING LOUIS

So. You are a wizard, Cesare Borgia.

CESARE

A warlock, maybe.

He looks at Micheletto.

CESARE (CONT'D)

I have reason to hate Naples. And everything inside it. It humiliated my sister. Her child.

He stands.

CESARE (CONT'D)

So, if I could sap the will, the lifeblood, the life, perhaps, of that city, in a week, would you thank me for it?

KING LOUIS

We would be grateful. But skeptical.

CESARE

I will live with gratitude.

He stands.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Come, Micheletto. Gian Carlo Baglioni. Orsini. We have work to do.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. MT VESUVIUS. DAY.

By the yellow river, with the dead cows. Cesare with the Wild Bunch, Micheletto, and a platoon of troops.

He has a map spread out, on a convenient rock.

CESARE

This water is poisoned.

BAGLIONI

Poisoned with what?

CESARE

I don't care. With some effluent from Vesuvius. But if it can kill a bull, it can kill a man. The question is, how do we get the water from this river - to the city of Naples.

Micheletto looks at the map.

MICHELETTO

By any and every means.

A MONTAGE –

Of barrel after barrel being filled from the yellow river.

Of an improvised wooden aqueduct, flowing with yellow water...

Of the wooden aqueduct, flowing with yellow water, pouring into a pristine river. . .

Of barrel after barrel being poured into pristine wells... Of a fountain in Naples, the mouth of a Neptune statue pouring forth yellow water.

INT. FRENCH KING'S TENT. DAWN.

A general enters the French tent, as he is dressing in his armor.

GENERAL

Sire, you must see this...

EXT. NAPLES. DAWN.

The King emerges from his tent to see –

The bodies of soldiers lie slumped on the battlements. The last one standing clutches his throat in agony, and falls, in slow motion, towards the ground below.

INT. CESARE'S TENT. DAWN.

Cesare asleep. The French King strides in.

KING LOUIS
What have you done?

CESARE
I have slept. The sleep of angels.

KING LOUIS
What have you done to Naples?

CESARE
Ah. Naples. I poisoned their water supply. Or tried to. Has it worked?

EXT. GATES OF NAPLES. DAY.

A series of explosion blast the gates from their hinges - to reveal - King Louis, Cesare Borgia, et al. An enormous army behind them.

The King stares, appalled. Cesare motions his horse inside.

CESARE
Enter, my liege. The city is yours.

INT. GATES OF NAPLES. DAY.

Dead bodies, everywhere. It is like an Iraqi village, after one of Saddam's gas attacks. Cesare rides past them, says to himself.

CESARE
Ours. . .

He stills his horse, and waits for the French King to join him.

KING LOUIS
But this is monstrous.

CESARE
But war is monstrous.

KING LOUIS

This is beyond all the rules of war. All of the laws of God.

CESARE

You valued your troops, you told me. Not one of them has harmed a hair on his head.

He leads his horse on.

CESARE (CONT'D)

And Naples was and always will be, a garden of weeds...

EXT. STREET. NAPLES. DAY.

Cesare turns his horse into another street, full of bodies. The Wild Bunch stand there, surveying the horrible scene. Baglioni is vomiting into the gutter.

CESARE

You surprise me Baglioni. I thought you had a stomach for warfare.

BAGLIONI

Warfare I can deal with, my lord.

CESARE

But bodies in the street discomfit you. And you are right.

He looks at the ashen faces of his condottore.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Disease will follow, as night follows day. Have them cleared. Burn them in a lime pit.

PAULO ORSINI

Is there a lime pit big enough?

CESARE

Then dig one.

He turns his horse. Micheletto follows him.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Every problem has its solution.

As he rides back, with Micheletto, he whispers to him.

CESARE (CONT'D)

You saw their faces?

MICHELETTO

Yes. I saw.

CESARE

What did you read there?

MICHELETTO

I saw fear.

CESARE

And I saw betrayal. Don't let them out of your sight.

INT. VATICAN PALACE. NIGHT.

The Pope and Della Rovere.

DELLA ROVERE

I have been asked by my Lord King Louis of France to convey his extreme abhorrence of your son's actions in Naples.

ALEXANDER

But Naples has been conquered. As King Louis desired.

DELLA ROVERE

In a manner against all laws of war. And all laws of God.

ALEXANDER

So, the King's war on Naples was a just war?

DELLA ROVERE

It was given sanction by your Holiness himself.

ALEXANDER

On the contrary. He announced his intentions. And made it clear that our reservations were of little consequence.

DELLA ROVERE

You supported him in spirit, and your son –

ALEXANDER

Our son, we believe, afforded his entry to the city without the loss of one French life.

DELLA ROVERE

He poisoned half the population...

ALEXANDER

It is war, ambassador. Neither just nor godly. A war King Louis chose. A war you, no doubt, advised him to choose.

He eyes Della Rovere with contempt.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

So if Naples is to lie on anyone's conscience, cardinal, let it lie on yours.

EXT. STREET. NAPLES. NIGHT.

The bodies are being loaded onto wagons, and dusted with lime.

Baglioni, the Orsini brothers and Vitelli are supervising.

PAULO ORSINI

Is there any end to his ambition?

VITELLI

No. No end to his savagery, either.

BAGLIONI

Our estates will be next.

VITELLI

So, we are no longer his allies?

BAGLIONI

Why should he stop here? Umbria, the Marches, the whole of the Romagna.

VITELLI

We were never his allies.

BAGLIONI

We are and always have been, his pawns.

PAULO ORSINI

I have an aunt, you know, in a nunnery south of Rome. Under Orsini patronage. She told me of an aristocratic charge that joined them.

VITELLI

Who?

PAULO ORSINI
Lucrezia Borgia.

VITELLI
His sister, a nun?

PAULO ORSINI
She is in hiding. She fears him too. And she is the only thing he cares for. In this world.

BAGLIONI
And if we could –

PAULO ORSINI
I am ahead of you, my friend. I have a band of the Orsini waiting to be given the word. To snatch her.
She may be well be our only protection –

And as the soldiers grab another body to throw onto the wagons, we see a lime-covered figure roll to the base of the pile.

It is Micheletto.

He rolls into the shadow of a doorway and slips off.

INT. BEDROOM. NAPLES. NIGHT.

Cesare, asleep. A lime-covered figure appears on his balcony. It is Micheletto.

MICHELETTO
My Lord –

EXT. ROADWAY. NIGHT.

Micheletto and a party of soldiers ride through the night.

EXT. NUNNERY GARDENS. NIGHT.

Micheletto and the party of soldiers walks quietly through the nunnery gardens.

MICHELETTO
Have the horses tied and hobbled. Surround the place. Don't make a sound.

INT. NUNNERY. NIGHT.

A window opens and Micheletto enters. He drops to the floor and walks silently through the

sleeping nunnery.

INT. CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

Micheletto walks down the corridor. Glances in every cell window. Comes to one that stops him.

POV - THROUGH CELL BARS –

Pia, in one bed, with her shorn hair. Lucrezia in the other, with her golden locks.

Micheletto opens the door.

INT. CELL. NIGHT.

Micheletto enters. Bends down towards Lucrezia. When she wakes, he places his hand over her mouth.

MICHELETTO

Hush, my lady. And forgive my presence.

As she stares at him he keeps his hand on her mouth.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)

You were betrayed. Is there an Orsini nun here?

Lucrezia nods.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)

Where?

She takes his hand away. And whispers.

LUCREZIA

She does the night watch.

And she points to the barred window.

Micheletto stands. He puts his fingers to his lips. And waits.

INT. CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

Harsh old sister Benvenuta Orsini walks the corridor, checking each barred window.

INT. CELL. NIGHT.

The barred window. Micheletto's face, to one side, against the wall. When the sister's face appears at the bars, he whips open the door, pulls her inside.

Pia wakes and gasps. Lucrezia puts a hand over her mouth. Micheletto has sister Benvenuta against the wall, with a knife against her throat.

MICHELETTO

I have just one question, sister. When do they strike?

SISTER BENVENUTA

Who?

MICHELETTO

Your brothers. Your half brothers. Your cousins. Your second cousins, once-removed.

When she says nothing, he brings the knife close to her eyeball.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)

And don't lie. I know all about it –

SISTER BENVENUTA

At matins –

MICHELETTO

Matins. When the sisters sing. And who affords them entry?

SISTER BENVENUTA

Me.

MICHELETTO

And you shall still do so.

EXT. NUNNERY. DAWN.

A group of shadowy figures slip through the dawn mists towards the nunnery. There is the sound of beautiful singing.

INT. NUNNERY. DAWN.

A lock is opened and the Orsini assassins file through. On Sister Benvenuta's face, as the scarred faces of the Orsini assassins pass her by. The singing grows louder.

INT. CHAPEL. NUNNERY. DAWN.

On the nuns singing matins. Lucrezia among them, Pia next to her.

Behind them, doors open. The singing falters. The leader of the Orsini speaks out.

GIAMBATTISTA ORSINI

Finish your matins, sisters. We just want one among you who is no sister –

And the singing resumes, then falters. He bellows.

GIAMBATTISTA ORSINI (CONT'D)

I said keep up the plain chant. While we search out the Borgia amongst you –

As the camera cranes over the terrified, singing nuns, we find the back row is filled with men in black habits. Micheletto, the band of soldiers.

As the Orsini reach them, they turn, whip them off and the fun begins.

It is no fair contest. Almost a massacre, as the terrified nuns keep up their singing...

INT. NAPLES PALACE. MORNING.

The Wild Bunch at breakfast. Cesare Borgia enters.

CESARE

I want to thank you, my condiotorre, for all of your help -

Some of them stand nervously, while still eating.

CESARE (CONT'D)

No, sit. Sit. This conquest would not have been possible without it. Without Gian Carlo Baglioni. Roberto and Paulo Orsini. Vitelezzo Vitelli. Your families. Your arms.

He joins them at table.

CESARE (CONT'D)

We shall leave the French to enjoy the spoils of Naples. Eh, Gian Carlo?

BAGLIONI

What remains of it.

CESARE

Oh, Naples will flourish again. The city was too crowded, anyway.

He looks at them for a moment. Paulo Orsini laughs nervously. Then Cesare laughs. And they all laugh in turn.

CESARE (CONT'D)

And I realize you have been itching for your share of booty. Wondering when it will come. What will be your reward. And I swear you shall have it.

VITELLI

When, my Lord?

CESARE

Where is more the question.

He drinks.

CESARE (CONT'D)

In central Italy. The Romagna. It is almost ours, at present. I shall create a kingdom there, and each of you will rule a vastly expanded principality. Tyrants will fall, one by one. And one by one you shall replace them. We shall ride back to Rome. Plan our last campaign. And each of you shall return from it a prince.

Paulo Orsini looks to Vitelli, Baglioni. Can this be for real? Orsini slowly raises his glass.

PAULO ORSINI

I'll drink to that.

And one by one their glasses are raised.

CESARE

Each of us a prince!

ALL

Il Principe!!

INT. CHAPEL. NUNNERY. DAY.

Bodies, strewn over the chapel floor. Blood, streaming in rivulets over the once immaculate floor.

Nuns are fleeing the scene in terror.

Little Pia gasps in shock, hyperventilating, trying to catch her breath. Lucrezia wraps her arms around her.

PIA

What is this? This horror?

LUCREZIA

It is my family.

Micheletto pulls his knife from one last assailant, and turns to them, covered in blood.

MICHELETTO
Come, my lady –

LUCREZIA
This horror has a name. It is called Borgia –

Micheletto grabs her wrist.

MICHELETTO
We must flee, my lady - now –

EXT. ROAD FROM NAPLES. DAY.

Cesare, and the Wild Bunch, riding back towards Rome. Baglioni whispers to Paulo Orsini, as they ride.

BAGLIONI
Where is his henchman? Micheletto?

Orsini shakes his head. He looks worried.

ORSINI
He's not with us. Something's up.

BAGLIONI
Can you call off your Orsini band?

ORSINI
For all I know, it could already be too late.

BAGLIONI
So what do we do? Sneak off into the night?

ORSINI
An admission of guilt, if there ever was one. No, we have no option but to sit tight...

INT. ST PETER'S. DAY.

Lucrezia sits in the half empty church, like a widow in mourning. She looks up and sees Cesare walking towards her.

CESARE

Is the rumor true. Sis? That you considered taking Holy Orders?

LUCREZIA

I even considered a name, brother. Sister Angela.

CESARE

Sister Lucrezia is infinitely preferable.

He stands above her.

LUCREZIA

There is something to be said for the quiet of a nunnery. Those sisters are at peace in their hearts.

CESARE

And this sister is not?

He places his hand against her cheek.

LUCREZIA

No. Not as yet.

And she can't resist it. She touches his hand.

CESARE

May I sit?

LUCREZIA

You may.

CESARE

I heard another rumor. That my sister, whom I love so much, was hiding from me.

LUCREZIA

I am afraid, brother. To be in the same room as you.

CESARE

You are afraid of me?

LUCREZIA

You know what I'm afraid of. Myself. You're here. And I have that old illusion. That God has stepped in the room with us.

CESARE

We are in St Peter's. God's very room.

LUCREZIA

Ah. So that explains my beating heart.

She lays her head on his shoulder.

CESARE

And will you hide from me again?

LUCREZIA

Yes. I will leave again. You will do your damndest. To track me down again.

CESARE

I have another solution, sis. You could marry.

LUCREZIA

I have tried that. Twice.

CESARE

You could marry as I have done. For convenience. Then we would both be free to meet. To love.
Without scandal.

LUCREZIA

Marry whom?

CESARE

Some duke. Some noble. Some prince. Whom such an arrangement suited. Marriage should be nothing
to do with the heart, Lucrezia. I learned that in France. Never confuse love with marriage.

LUCREZIA

Yes. The results can be lethal.

CESARE

So have I your permission to begin the search?

LUCREZIA

You? The way our father did?

He reaches for her. She turns away.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)

Don't you understand, brother? I want to find a love... that will free me from this love...

He sits, watching her for a moment.

CESARE

I have had news, sis. I am to be a father.

And she turns, and is overwhelmed.

LUCREZIA

Oh, Cesare –

She takes his hand, brings it to her cheek.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)

Oh my love, I cannot wait. To think, a child of yours, to play with Giovanni...

And she turns away again.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)

You have won again, haven't you? You knew the effect those words would have.

CESARE

Can I be blamed for hoping?

LUCREZIA

No.

She plays with his hand, over her lips.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)

So. You would find me a husband. The way my father did.

CESARE

Ferarra has made overtures.

LUCREZIA

You already have one in mind.

CESARE

They need our alliance. The Duke is past his youth. He would need an heir. But make no demands beyond that...

He rubs her lips.

CESARE (CONT'D)

On your heart.

LUCREZIA

Ah, so. My heart can still belong to you...

INT. PAPAL APARTMENTS. DAY.

Cesare and his father.

ALEXANDER

So Naples is... somebody's...

CESARE

Naples is ours, father.

ALEXANDER

Ours. King Louis'. Queen
Isabella's.

CESARE

Without a drop of French blood spilt.

ALEXANDER

So we heard.

He fixes Cesare with his beady eye.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

And Lucrezia has returned, from whatever sanctuary you drove her towards.

CESARE

She spent some time with God.

ALEXANDER

Almost an eternity, we have heard.

CESARE

There was a plot to seize her. Hold her hostage.

ALEXANDER

A plot by whom?

CESARE

Orsini. Baglioni. Vitelli.

Alexander smiles.

ALEXANDER

You do choose your friends.

CESARE
They had their uses.

ALEXANDER
And we shall have our revenge. But on our terms. There will be no more public massacres.

CESARE
Instruct me then, father.

ALEXANDER
You will bide your time. Wait. Put them at their ease. Take them to your bosom. And when you strike, do it outside Rome.

CESARE
Yes, father.

ALEXANDER
I want your word on this.

CESARE
You have it. Outside Rome.

ALEXANDER
Italy applauds a beautiful deception, an elegant revenge. We will give them one they can celebrate.

INT. VATICAN CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

Cesare, walking. Micheletto behind him.

CESARE
Bring me to Paulo Orsini.

INT. ORSINI'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Paulo Orsini asleep. Micheletto, above him. He puts a knife to his throat, and clamps his hand over his mouth.

MICHELETTO
Hush Paulo, hush. It is all good. And my master would speak with you...

The silhouette of Cesare appears behind the curtain, on the balcony.

EXT. BALCONY. NIGHT.

The situation now reversed. Cesare and Paulo Orsini, on the balcony, overlooking Rome.

Micheletto is silhouetted on the curtain, from inside.

CESARE

Was it you or your brother, Paulo, who sent those assassins?

PAULO

It was neither, my Lord. I swear. The convent was on Orsini lands. My cousin was an Orsini nun.
Word travels, as you know.

CESARE

Yes, it does. And the Orsini clan is a force of nature.

PAULO

They are territorial, my Lord.

CESARE

To say the least. There was a bloodbath.

PAULO

Nothing of my doing.

Cesare sighs.

CESARE

We will forget this unfortunate incident. Because I need my band of brothers. Orsini. Vitelli. Baglioni.
We have a hard task ahead of us, and will only succeed together. But you will keep this conversation
between us. Your word?

*Cesare holds out his hand. Orsini stares. Cesare's words sound too good to be true. But he shakes,
because he has to.*

PAULO

My word.

INT. BORGIA VILLA. NIGHT.

Lucrezia and Vanozza dine.

LUCREZIA

Have you heard mention of the word Ferrara, mother?

VANOZZA

I must confess I have.

LUCREZIA

Another marriage? To the Duke D'Este this time?

VANOZZA

Only when... and if... you are ready for it.

LUCREZIA

Ferrara has one advantage, mother. It is neither Rome nor Naples. And the Duke, Cesare tells me, is old.

VANOZZA

He is not young.

LUCREZIA

And you think I could find peace there? With my boy?

VANOZZA

Ferrara is a haven of the arts. Poetry, music, sculpture. Some call it the Florence of the North.

Lucrezia takes a breath. She lifts her mother's hand.

LUCREZIA

I have two demands here, mother. That you take care of all negotiation. And that you, if these negotiations prove successful, move with me to my new home.

VANOZZA

Out of Rome? That would be a blessing. But you think me up to such a task?

LUCREZIA

I can think of no-one better.

VANOZZA

They have sent an ambassador, to present Ferrara's terms. A poet. Pietro Bembo.

INT. VATICAN GARDENS. EVENING.

A figure, standing there in the flickering lamplight. Pietro Bembo. He is handsome, elegant, refined, beautifully dressed. A real stunner.

Lucrezia appears behind him.

LUCREZIA

Pietro Bembo –

BEMBO

Hush –

LUCREZIA

Why should I hush?

BEMBO

Because you might disturb them.

LUCREZIA

Disturb what?

BEMBO

The fireflies –

She walks closer. Sees that he is holding a lace handkerchief, covered in fireflies.

He blows them, and they flicker up across her face.

BEMBO (CONT'D)

And you are?

LUCREZIA

Lucrezia Borgia. Come to take you to dine with His Holiness the Pope.

BEMBO

How sad.

LUCREZIA

Sad?

BEMBO

That my task is to negotiate such beauty into another's palace.

LUCREZIA

But you are part of the palace, I have been told?

BEMBO

Of course. Now I am happy again.

LUCREZIA

Its poet in residence.

BEMBO

I plead guilty.

LUCREZIA

I have never been in a palace, with a poet in residence.

BEMBO

You must come then. And never leave.

INT. BAGLIONI'S VILLA. NIGHT.

A banquet, in Baglioni's villa. Half naked girls sing around a table, while our Wild Bunch eat.

VITELLI

What are we celebrating, Baglioni?

BAGLIONI

Our survival.

VITELLI

But does anyone yet know what happened? At that bloody convent?

Paulo Orsini looks from one to the other. He knows something bad happened, but he is not sharing it.

BAGLIONI

Come on, Paulo –

ORSINI

My cousins came - but they had already left.

BAGLIONI

They?

ORSINI

Lucrezia Borgia. And his – Micheletto.

Vitelli takes a breath.

VITELLI

So he knew. Something was in the offing.

ORSINI

How could he have known? We still live.

VITELLI

Can you call this living? I can hardly sleep at night.

ORSINI

Stay the course. Bide your time. He suspects, perhaps, but he doesn't know. And, our moment will come, believe me –

And he raises his eyes. Because a figure has come into view, led towards him by a manservant.

MANSERVANT

Signor Micheletto Corella.

Micheletto bows.

MICHELETTO

Gentlemen.

They all nod their heads. Disdainful, or nervous, it is hard to tell which.

ORSINI

Micheletto.

MICHELETTO

We all celebrate, it seems, the liberation of Naples.

VITELLI

Yes. We freed their souls all right.

MICHELETTO

And there will be more, it seems, to celebrate.

He looks around as the hush descends.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)

My Lord would meet with you tomorrow. Fully armed, your forces ready for the next campaign. The Pope Himself will bless you in your endeavours.

The bunch look at each other. Once more off the hook.

VITELLI

Where are we headed?

MICHELETTO

Only the Duke knows. He keeps his counsel.

And Micheletto bows, and leaves.

The bunch listen until the front door closes. Then they raise their glasses.

VITELLI

The Pope Himself will bless us –

INT. VATICAN GARDENS. NIGHT.

A beautiful table, set out on the lawns. The Pope dines, with Vanozza and Lucrezia and Pietro Bembo.

ALEXANDER

So, tell us about your patron, Pietro Bembo.

BEMBO

Well the Duke D'Este is a man of impeccable taste.

He glances at Lucrezia.

BEMBO (CONT'D)

In all of the arts. Painting, sculpture...

LUCREZIA

And poetry, no doubt.

ALEXANDER

He is a collector then. But not of wives, we hope...

BEMBO

He was married once before. He has long been a widower.

VANOZZA

You can cut to the chase, signor Bembo. What he most wants in a woman is...

BEMBO

An heir. His first wife was barren. He is of an age where men of his substance must think about succession.

VANOZZA

And beyond that?

ALEXANDER

Vanozza –

VANOZZA

Hush Rodrigo. Be so kind as to let me handle this one.

BEMBO

Beyond that, his future wife will be free to live as she sees fit.

VANOZZA

With her own household? With quarters of her own?

BEMBO

With a palace of her own. The Duke has his male companions.

ALEXANDER

Ah. He hunts? He jousts?

BEMBO

Far from it. He enjoys the company of artists. And their models.

And here we can see the subtext, however delicately expressed. The Duke is gay.

ALEXANDER

So his wife, once an heir is produced, shall be free of further... marital responsibilities?

BEMBO

She will be free, as a bird.

Lucrezia is staring at him. He returns her gaze.

LUCREZIA

I do like poetry. Tasso. Petrarch. Dante.

BEMBO

We shall have a lot to talk about then. Should you ever reach Ferrara.

Alexander and Vanozza exchange a glance.

INT. BALCONY. VATICAN. NIGHT.

Cesare, on a balcony, outside the Pope's chambers. He is watching, down below –

POV - VATICAN GARDENS –

Lucrezia, Bembo and Vanozza, laughing, at the remains of the supper table.

ON THE BALCONY –

The Pope comes to join Cesare.

ALEXANDER

Bembo. What do you know of him?

CESARE

A poet, I have been told. In the court of Ferrara. The Duke D'Este is known to enjoy his male companions.

ALEXANDER

Is that a bad thing in a husband?

CESARE

It depends on what one wants of a husband.

ALEXANDER

Your sister will want as little as possible. And we will need allies in the North. After tomorrow –

CESARE

Tell me.

ALEXANDER

Sinigaglia has signaled its willingness to surrender its fortress. We have summoned its Lord here, to hand the titles to us. Send your condiotorre there, to take possession. And do what you will with them.

INT. VATICAN PALACE. DAY.

The Wild Bunch there, in full armor. Cesare, still dressed casually, as if he has just woken up.

BAGLIONI

So what is our goal today, my Lord?

CESARE

Our goal? Today as every other day?

He smiles.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Survival.

He looks around at them, and smiles.

CESARE (CONT'D)

But you have a simple task ahead of you. Sinigaglia.

VITELLI
You intend another siege?

CESARE
The Lord of Sinigaglia has told me his willingness to surrender. In person, to me. In fact, he rides here as we speak.

He smiles again.

CESARE (CONT'D)
Our reputation for ferocity precedes us now. Citizens will revolt, Dukes will willingly fall, rather than face what happened at Naples.

He stands.

CESARE (CONT'D)
So. I will receive the Lord here, with his deeds of title, while you take possession of his fortress. You will find the drawbridge down, the gates open. And this, my friend, is just the dawn of your ascendancy.

He opens the doors.

CESARE (CONT'D)
Come. Meet my father.

INT. CONCLAVE. DAY.

The Pope, in full regalia, in his ceremonial seat.

Cesare stands to one side, as Baglioni bends to kiss his ring.

BAGLIONI
Holiness...

Alexander blesses him.

ALEXANDER
Heavenly father, your warrior prepares for battle. May he wear the breastplate of righteousness...

Next in line, we see the Orsini brothers and Vitelli, waiting.

Cesare catches his father's eye. The briefest of glances tells us everything.

INT. CESARE'S QUARTERS. DAY.

Cesare there, with Machiavelli.

MACHIAVELLI

I am writing a book, my Lord.

CESARE

You have forsaken diplomacy?

MACHIAVELLI

It may have forsaken me.

CESARE

Democracy doesn't suit you?

MACHIAVELLI

It hardly suits Florence. But while the fashion for it holds, I shall write my book.

CESARE

A book on what?

MACHIAVELLI

What I know best. Power. Princes.

CESARE

Perhaps you can teach me something. Of power, and princes.

MACHIAVELLI

Or perhaps it is the reverse, my Lord. Perhaps you are teaching me.

CESARE

Then journey with me today. To Sinigaglia.

MACHIAVELLI

Why Sinigaglia?

CESARE

Because there beginneth the lesson.

EXT. ROADSIDE. DAY.

Cesare, Micheletto and Machiavelli, riding along.

MACHIAVELLI

What is the lesson called, my Lord?

CESARE
It is called revenge.

INT. BORGIA VILLA GARDENS. EVENING.

Lucrezia sits with Pietro Bembo, in the evening light.

LUCREZIA
Do you want to know the truth?

BEMBO
Tell me.

LUCREZIA
I would marry anyone that would ensure my freedom from this family.

BEMBO
Oh, my dear.

LUCREZIA
I would even marry you.

BEMBO
You could never marry me.

LUCREZIA
But I may not have to.

She looks straight into his eyes.

BEMBO
So tell me, about this family of yours.

LUCREZIA
Will it hinder my marriage prospects? The truth? Between us?

He shakes his head.

LUCREZIA
Consider that... they have lived through the age of Leonardo, Raphael, Donatello, not to speak of the greatest genius of them all - Michelangelo. And what have they achieved?

BEMBO
Power?

LUCREZIA

Power to do what? Italy is a wasteland. Naples is a tomb. Milan? Even Leonardo has fled to France.
What have they built? What artists have they patronised?

BEMBO

Pinturicchio?

LUCREZIA

The little painter? Is that all they leave to history?

BEMBO

Their... reputation...

LUCREZIA

A reputation for mayhem. Murder. Bloodshed. And an insatiable lust for power.

She shivers.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)

And I am cold now. Why am I cold?

He reaches out a hand to touch her face.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)

No. Do not touch me. Yet.

EXT. SINIGAGLIA. EVENING.

The walls, the moat.

The condiotorre ride past, ahead of their armies. They come to the overpass, or drawbridge.

The citadel seems undefended.

There is a gateman there, fishing in the moat. He hardly seems to notice their approach.

Baglioni leads his horse across the bridge, towards him.

BAGLIONI

Where is the Lord?

GATEMAN

Gone to Rome.

BAGLIONI

And his army?

GATEMAN

His army has... gone fishing... scattered, to the hills...

BAGLIONI

So we are expected?

GATEMAN

In a manner of speaking.

He stands. Bows, gesturing them inside.

GATEMAN (CONT'D)

Enter...

One by one, the condiotorre motion their horses through.

And as their army makes to follow, the gateman pulls a hidden lever.

A portcullis crashes down.

The horses rear, panicked. The army presses forwards in confusion, but can do nothing.

INT. SINGALIA. EVENING.

Baglioni, Paulo and Roberto Orsini, and Vitelli find themselves in an empty square. They look back vainly at their armies, pressed against the portcullis gates.

VITELLI

What's going on?

Paulo Orsini looks the most worried.

ORSINI

I think I know...

BAGLIONI

What do you know, Orsini?

Suddenly, pages blow in the wind across the empty square. Niccolo Machiavelli runs out from under an arch, chasing his pages.

MACHIAVELLI

Pardon me gentlemen...

As he catches the pages.

MACHIAVELLI (CONT'D)

My papers...

As he catches page after page, soldiers of the papal army step out from the shadows and take their places along the walls.

Orsini whips his horse into a gallop. He rides through the square, looking for an exit.

Micheletto jumps from a balcony, and drags him to the ground. The three remaining condottieri stay rooted to the spot, trying to still their nervous horses.

And now Cesare Borgia walks into the square. He picks one of Machiavelli's pages from the cobblestones.

CESARE

Signor Machiavelli is writing a book.

He hands Machiavelli the page. He walks up to Baglioni. Holds the reins of his horse.

CESARE (CONT'D)

On power and princes.

BAGLIONI

I did not know that, my Lord.

CESARE

But you knew all about my sister, did you not? The attempt on her life?

Paulo Orsini reaches for his sword.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Don't, Paulo. If you want an easeful death...

Machiavelli stares, as armed men surround the plotters.

MACHIAVELLI (V.O.)

And so began the beautiful deception of Sinigaglia, which every prince should study for his advancement...

INT. PALAZZO. SINIGAGLIA. NIGHT.

Baglioni is dragged down a set of dank stairs. He points at Paulo Orsini, being dragged behind

him.

BAGLIONI

It was him - he led us to it –

Cesare stands at the top of the stairs.

CESARE

Well. Then he shall die the same death as you.

INT. PALAZZO BASEMENT. NIGHT.

Vitelli, with a garotte around his neck.

The others sit watching, appalled, and bound.

VITELLI

I beg the Pope to grant indulgence for my sins –

MICHELETTO

I shall convey your request, my Lord.

INT. BANQUET ROOM. SINIGAGLIA. NIGHT.

Cesare, dining with Machiavelli. As Cesare talks, Machiavelli takes notes.

MACHIAVELLI (V.O.)

Fortune is a woman. To keep her under, the Duke deemed it necessary to beat her and ill-use her.

INT. PALAZZO BASEMENT. NIGHT.

The Orsini brothers are bound together by the same garotte. Micheletto is strangling them both. Baglioni stares from a chair, in horror.

MICHELETTO

Do not fret, my Lord. You will not have to share.

INT. BANQUET ROOM. SINIGAGLIA. NIGHT.

Cesare and Machiavelli. Cesare still talking.

MACHIAVELLI (V.O.)

And being a woman, she is a lover of young men...

INT. PALAZZO BASEMENT. NIGHT.

Three bodies lying, bleeding from the neck. Micheletto garrotes the last of them, Baglioni.

MACHIAVELLI (V.O.)

...because they are less cautious, more violent and can with more audacity command her.

EXT. ROAD TO ROME. DAWN.

Cesare, Machiavelli and Micheletto thunder through, on their way back to Rome.

INT. POPE'S QUARTERS. DAY.

Cesare, the Pope and Machiavelli. In a private, hellish conclave.

ALEXANDER

Write this down, signor Machiavelli.

As Machiavelli scribbles.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Our enemies are either dead, held prisoner, or are fugitives. Even if they stand their ground, they nonetheless consciously await their fates. So the dragon devours lesser serpents.

CESARE

There remains Della Rovere.

MACHIAVELLI

And how will you deal with him, my Lord?

ALEXANDER

We will invite him to dinner.

INT. BORGIA VILLA. DAY.

Lucrezia, with Pietro Bembo, in the dining room.

BEMBO

You can be free of your family.

LUCREZIA

I can dream...

BEMBO

We have agreed to their terms. They want more of gold and plate and of oaths of allegiance than any

Cesar. But the Duke desires this match.

LUCREZIA

Why?

BEMBO

Because I have told him. You are more beautiful than Helen.

LUCREZIA

I thought he didn't care for women.

BEMBO

He cares for beauty. You will bring him your child. And bear him another. He cares for that.

LUCREZIA

When can I meet him?

BEMBO

When you come to Ferrara. But he is graciousness itself. Believe me.

LUCREZIA

I can create an academy, perhaps. Leave something for the future.

BEMBO

And you will have a friend there. Always. In me.

LUCREZIA

Just a friend?

BEMBO

More than a friend. If that's what you want.

He looks at her.

BEMBO (CONT'D)

And kiss me. Now.

She looks at him. She does so.

And just at that point, Cesare enters into view, on the walkway visible through the window.

CESARE

Sis –

They draw apart. Cesare walks on. But he has seen them.

LUCREZIA

Go now.

BEMBO

Why the hurry? I have to give your brother the duke's terms.

LUCREZIA

I will give them. And believe me, he probably knows them already.

BEMBO

Is he that alarming?

LUCREZIA

Jealous is the word. Of any happiness I might snatch. Without him.

She hurries him out the doorway.

EXT. BORGIA VILLA. DAY.

Lucrezia puts two fingers to his lips, as she sends Bembo off.

INT. BORGIA VILLA. DAY.

Lucrezia comes back up the stairs, to find Cesare at the top.

CESARE

Sister.

LUCREZIA

Cesare.

CESARE

I had hoped to meet Bembo.

LUCREZIA

Oh, he gives his apologies. He had forgotten a prior engagement.

He looks at her closely.

CESARE

Perhaps it's just as well.

LUCREZIA

You think?

CESARE

Yes.

He puts his arm around her.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Ferrara is far weaker than I thought. And Florence is not keen on that alliance.

LUCREZIA

Ah. We must not disappoint Florence.

CESARE

We can, happily, but there are other possibilities. In France, for instance.

LUCREZIA

France?

CESARE

France is full of gouty dukes and princes, in need of an heir.

LUCREZIA

But all that will take time, brother.

CESARE

Perfect. And we shall put it to perfect use...

He kisses her on the cheek.

CESARE (CONT'D)

And I have a favour to ask. That only one with your grace could deliver to me.

LUCREZIA

Ask, then.

CESARE

Cardinal Della Rovere. We would invite him to dine with us.

LUCREZIA

With us?

CESARE

With me, and our father. To discuss our differences. See if we can put them to rest.

LUCREZIA

Why me?

CESARE

Let me count the answers.

He puts his arms around her.

CESARE (CONT'D)

You are intelligent, you are diplomatic, you are beautiful, and you are and always will be...

He kisses her.

CESARE (CONT'D)

MINE. . .

EXT. ROMAN STREETS. DAY.

Lucrezia walks through the streets, a hood covering her head. She turns into a magnificent palazzo.

INT. DELLA ROVERE'S PALAZZO. DAY.

Lucrezia, before cardinal Della Rovere.

DELLA ROVERE

To what do I owe the pleasure, donna Lucrezia?

LUCREZIA

I am merely a messenger, cardinal.

DELLA ROVERE

And the message?

LUCREZIA

An invitation to dine, with His Holiness the Pope and the Duke Valentino.

Della Rovere smiles.

DELLA ROVERE

And should I accept?

LUCREZIA

If you value your health, no.

DELLA ROVERE
You surprise me, lady.

LUCREZIA
I know. I surprise even myself.

DELLA ROVERE
With your honesty? Your bluntness?

LUCREZIA
They will be rid of you. If not on this occasion, on another.

DELLA ROVERE
My answer then will have to be, no.

She stays, looking at him.

LUCREZIA
The French King has gone. You are less protected. Their day will come.

DELLA ROVERE
And why should that concern you?

LUCREZIA
Perhaps we have an interest in common.

DELLA ROVERE
And what could that possibly be?

LUCREZIA
The future. I have a child. I wish him to have one.

DELLA ROVERE
And?

LUCREZIA
You belong to a church. You wish it to have one.

DELLA ROVERE
A future?

LUCREZIA
You were a good man once. You could be pope one day.

DELLA ROVERE
I am intrigued...

INT. POPE'S QUARTERS. DAY.

The Pope and Cesare. Lucrezia enters. She says nothing, to Cesare's enquiring glance.

CESARE
He said no?

LUCREZIA
Not at all. He said yes. But insists that he will choose the venue.

ALEXANDER
Clever.

CESARE
Do we refuse?

ALEXANDER
We can't. But we take the occasion to set him at his ease. Sound him out. There will be other... dining opportunities...

CESARE
Will it be safe, father? For us?

ALEXANDER
We have our tasters.

CESARE
Another evening dining on cold scraps...

Lucrezia interjects.

LUCREZIA
Eat something small before you go brother. A collation. Then at least you can enjoy the wine...

INT. VATICAN DINING ROOM. EVENING.

Father and son walking round a small table filled with food. Lucrezia sits by a window in the background.

ALEXANDER
We need an intermediary with him, to lay a layer of trust. An ambassador, so to speak.

He eats.

CESARE
We have one.

He turns to Lucrezia.

ALEXANDER
Lucrezia?

CESARE
He trusts her enough to accept our invitation.

LUCREZIA
And that may be all the trust one gets, in Rome.

ALEXANDER
That may be all one needs. This game will be long, my son, and many sided. Each move will have its implications.

LUCREZIA
But I will soon be lost to you, father. In Ferrara, I believe.

ALEXANDER
We are re-considering Ferrara, are we not?

He looks to Cesare. Lucrezia lowers her eyes.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
And eat something now, so you can keep your wits about you-

Cesare eats something.

EXT. VILLA. NIGHT.

A banquet table, entirely draped in muslin. The loud noise of cicadas can be heard, the unearthly whine of mosquitos.

As the camera creeps closer to the scene, we see there are thousand of mosquitos dead against the muslin. And more are flying against it by the second.

Inside the muslin, at a magnificent banquet, are Cardinal Della Rovere, Cesare Borgia and his father the pope.

Both Cesare and Rodrigo have tasters on either side of them.

DELLA ROVERE

Rome is particularly lethal this summer.

ALEXANDER

Indeed. By the lake. With the heat. The mosquitos.

DELLA ROVERE

But one leaves it at one's peril don't you think?

ALEXANDER

We would be safer in the hills. But our enemies would prosper in the swamp we had left behind.

A MOSQUITO –

Now buzzing towards the Pope. He swats it away with his wet handkerchief, then refreshes it in the lemon-scented water.

DELLA ROVERE

So, you might agree then. We must find a solution, to this perpetual rancour. This division. Or the world will force it upon us.

ALEXANDER

We have considered a solution that the world might not be ready for.

DELLA ROVERE

Would you be so kind as to share it with me?

Alexander glances towards Cesare, and says nothing.

CESARE

We would hear your solution first, cardinal.

DELLA ROVERE

My solution... has the benefit of originality. And, it even has a precedent...

ALEXANDER

We are all ears...

DELLA ROVERE

If a Pope were to resign, in the full of his health, it would send out a sign to the whole of Christendom.

ALEXANDER

A sign of what, cardinal?

DELLA ROVERE

A sign that the occupant had forsaken self-interest. And had no further interest in the advancement of his family. It would restore the name of Borgia to - dare I say it - respectability. Even, perhaps, sanctity.

Cesare smiles.

CESARE

Our father the saint.

Alexander smiles, bitterly.

DELLA ROVERE

You must taste the quail, Holiness.

ALEXANDER

When it is tasted for us.

The taster chews. Seems to like it.

DELLA ROVERE

And we have here, Holiness, a perfect metaphor for your papacy.

ALEXANDER

How, pray?

DELLA ROVERE

The quail is delicious. It is, I can assure you, uncontaminated. But who enjoys it?

The taster stares at the Pope, his mouth full.

DELLA ROVERE (CONT'D)

His Holiness is the last to partake. By which time the dish is hardly warm. The most succulent meats have been already consumed. The taster grow fat, while His Holiness starves.

ALEXANDER

Great office does come with its own privations.

DELLA ROVERE

But if you were to step down, Holiness, in the fullness of your vigour and health. The world would have to recognise your probity. Your lack of nepotism. Your sanctity, even.

ALEXANDER

And who would succeed me?

DELLA ROVERE
That would be for the conclave to decide.

ALEXANDER
You?

DELLA ROVERE
If the Holy Spirit wills it. But, I could guarantee. . . in the event of my succession. . .

He glances round at the tasters.

DELLA ROVERE (CONT'D)
Could my words be for your ears alone, Holiness? And those of your son?

Alexander takes the plate of quail.

ALEXANDER
Leave us.

DELLA ROVERE
And enjoy my repast. . .

As the tasters leave.

DELLA ROVERE (CONT'D)
...finally...

EXT. MUSLIN TABLE. NIGHT.

The muslin billows as the tasters depart.

A MOSQUITO - flies to the muslin, as if desperately trying to enter...

INT. TABLE. NIGHT.

As Alexander finally eats.

ALEXANDER
It is delicious, cardinal.

DELLA ROVERE
And retains some heat, we hope.

ALEXANDER

So, continue... in the event of your succession?

DELLA ROVERE

In the event of my succession, I could guarantee your son's position...

CESARE

As?

DELLA ROVERE

As prince of the territories he now holds. Of a new principality in central Italy. Whose capital is Rome.

CESARE

And the Pope?

DELLA ROVERE

Would rule his spiritual kingdom, while the Prince rules his temporal one.

ALEXANDER

And we would retire? To gardening, perhaps? Beekeeping?

DELLA ROVERE

You would retire to whatever estate you chose. To enjoy the fruits of your long labours. With a reputation unblemished. Of probity, humility, and dare I say it, sanctity.

ALEXANDER

Sanctity?

DELLA ROVERE

Were I alive, as pope, when the Almighty finally gathered you to His loving arms, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

ALEXANDER

Saint Rodrigo.

Cesare smiles.

CESARE

Saint Alexander, father.

Della Rovere claps his hands.

DELLA ROVERE

And now that we have broached this delicate matter, your Holiness should recall your tasters, while another wine is poured...

Alexander nods his head, and the tasters return.

EXT. MUSLIN TABLE. NIGHT.

ANOTHER MOSQUITO - buzzing down from the Heavens. This one seems to mean business.

INT. TABLE. NIGHT.

The tasters taste the wine. They nod, in nervous approval. Alexander's glass is filled. Della Rovere stands.

DELLA ROVERE

I would propose a toast, Your Holiness. While our ambitions would seem at odds, they need not be.
So I would drink, to harmony, between those ambitions. And to peace between us.

Alexander nods.

ALEXANDER

To Harmony.

DELLA ROVERE

Harmony. And peace.

ALEXANDER

And peace.

DELLA ROVERE

My Lord Borgia?

Cesare raises his glass. They drink. Alexander raises his glass once more.

ALEXANDER

And we would propose our own toast.

As he raises his glass, he suddenly collapses into Cesare's arms.

CESARE

Father –

ALEXANDER

We feel –

And he suddenly vomits, blood, and bile, over Cesare and the table-cloth.

He turns and stares at Della Rovere.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
How did you manage –

Della Rovere stares, aghast.

DELLA ROVERE
Manage what?

CESARE
You are ill, Father -

He calls.

CESARE (CONT'D)
GUARDS!!!!

ALEXANDER
Poisoned –

And Cesare drags his father through the muslin, as Della Rovere tries to help.

CESARE
You will die for this –

And as the guards support his father, Cesare turns and grips Della Rovere by the throat.

CESARE (CONT'D)
-in agony-

And Cesare goes rigid, as if gripped by a rictus. He suddenly vomits blood, over Della Rovere's costume.

He falls back into the muslin cloth, dragging the whole tent with him.

And Della Rovere stares aghast, at Cesare Borgia rolling in agony through the blood-stained tent of muslin.

Over the chaotic scene, Machiavelli takes up the tale.

MACHIAVELLI (V.O.)
If the Duke did not succeed in his plans, it was not his fault, but was instead the result of an extraordinary and extreme instance of ill-fortune...

INT. THE VATICAN. NIGHT.

The pope and his son carried through the corridors, which are swarming with Vatican guards and terrified cardinals.

MACHIAVELLI (V.O.)

For Alexander fell ill five years after he had drawn his sword...

On Cesare's sweating, vomiting face, staring at the ornate ceiling above him.

MACHIAVELLI (V.O.)

...and though he had prepared for everything that might happen, he never dreamed that at the time of his father's illness, he too would be at death's door...

INT. PAPAL BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Alexander, taking long and painful breaths, while Lucrezia and Vanozza wipe his sweating forehead.

ALEXANDER

Did I take the wrong path, Vanozza? So long ago I cannot now remember?

VANOZZA

I can remember. The day, and the hour.

ALEXANDER

Forgive me then.

VANOZZA

You don't need my forgiveness. You need the forgiveness of God Almighty.

ALEXANDER

I must confess my sins...

LUCREZIA

Hush father, hush...

ALEXANDER

With whatever breath I have left...

Vanozza walks to the door.

INT. CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

The huddled semi-circle of cardinals.

VANOZZA
He needs a confessor –

And every cardinal turns away. Scurries down the corridor.

VANOZZA (CONT'D)
It is your duty - under God - to hear his last confession -

INT. PAPAL BEDROOM. NIGHT.

The Pope. Sweating on the bed. He has long since stopped pleading for help.

And now he wakes, once more. To see a figure, cowled like a monk, behind the curtains on the balcony.

ALEXANDER
Who is there?

The curtains shift.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
Water, please...

MONK
I have no water.

ALEXANDER
My lips are parched.

MONK
As are mine.

ALEXANDER
But you are a Franciscan? You have come to hear my confession?

The monk moves into the room.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
Thanks be to the living God...

MONK
You would have me hear your sins?

ALEXANDER
I would. I would cleanse my soul of every stain upon it.

MONK

The whole world knows your sins. Your soul is blacker than a moonless night.

ALEXANDER

But there can be light again, in
God's forgiveness.

MONK

For sins such as yours? Fornication? Adultery? Murder? Simony? A greed for gold that had no
boundary?

ALEXANDER

We know that God's mercy is infinite.

MONK

That is true.

ALEXANDER

And that even the worst of sinners can beg forgiveness with his last breath of life...

MONK

True again.

ALEXANDER

So I, Rodrigo Borgia beg forgiveness with my last words, my last breath upon this earth.

MONK

But forgiveness, for you, Rodrigo
Borgia, is impossible.

ALEXANDER

Why?

MONK

Because you have taken your last breath.

ALEXANDER

I have? When?

MONK

Does it matter when? A second, or an infinity? You are dead. You can confess your sins for ten
eternities, and God will not hear them. This is hell, and you are in it.

Smoke is now billowing from the monk's cowl. Alexander reaches out to grab it. It bursts into

flame.

ALEXANDER
No pope belongs in hell –

And the flames seem to speak.

MONK
This one does...

And the bed is burning underneath him now. Alexander tries to rise.

Behind him, we see the frescoes have turned into images of hell from Heironymus Bosch.

Alexander screams, as the flames consume him.

CUT TO -

A face, leaning down towards him, with a feather.

Lucrezia.

LUCREZIA
He has breathed his last.

ON ALEXANDER'S DEAD FACE, ALREADY TURNING BLACK.

Vanozza prays beside him.

And now, like a group of red vampires, the cardinals enter, circling round, dropping to their knees.

INT. CESARE'S QUARTERS. DAY.

Cesare, like a barely-moving skeleton, lying on his bed. All of the shutters are closed against the daylight. Lucrezia enters.

LUCREZIA
Our father is dead.

Cesare can hardly speak. Eventually, he says –

CESARE
When?

LUCREZIA

Two hours ago. Nobody will touch the body. But it seems that you might live, brother –

CESARE
So who did it, sis?

LUCREZIA
Whoever stood to profit by it. Is that not the Vatican way?

CESARE
Della Rovere.

LUCREZIA
So. He will make a perfect candidate for Pope.

CESARE
He was our last standing enemy –

LUCREZIA
You must cultivate his favour then. Or do as I am doing. Leave this charnel house.

She stands.

CESARE
Sis –

LUCREZIA
Yes, brother?

CESARE
You must help me to avenge this crime.

LUCREZIA
I can think of no better vengeance than the throne of St. Peters.

She takes his head in her hands and kisses his lips. She says, softly.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)
Look what it did to us.

EXT. STREETS OF ROME. DAY.

Micheletto drives a carriage out of Rome. Inside it we see the sweating, feverish figure of Cesare Borgia.

MACHIAVELLI (V.O.)

A prince may be seen happy today and ruined tomorrow without having shown any change in his character.

INT. LIBRARY. DAY.

Machiavelli scribbling with a feathered pen.

MACHIAVELLI (V.O.)

For the prince who relies entirely on fortune is lost when it changes...

The camera tracks into the vellum page, as he writes.

IT DISSOLVES INTO -

The thundering hooves of horses, over a dusty arid landscape.

Cesare Borgia is riding, sword drawn, towards an oncoming group of horsemen. He is flung from his horse by a spear, that pierces him through. As he falls, he calls out –

CESARE
Micheletto!!!

Micheletto turns, leaps from his horse, runs back towards him. As he runs, arrow after arrow pierces him, twisting his body this way and that. Then a shot from an arquebus shatters his shoulder, throwing him into the dust.

As his hand reaches out for Cesare's, the camera tracks into Cesare's dying face.

IT DISSOLVES INTO –

The portrait of Cesare Borgia by Altobello Melone. A legend reads:

LEGEND

Cesare Borgia died fighting vainly to reclaim the lands and territories he had once conquered.

EXT. HILLTOP IN FERRARA. DAY.

A party on horse back. A carriage behind them. Lucrezia, Vanozza, Giovanni and Pietro Bembo.

BEMBO
And there it is. Ferrara.

As he guides their horses down to the beautiful town, nestled among Italian hills, the landscape freezes, into the classic landscape of Ferrara by Dosso Dossi.

IT DISSOLVES INTO –

The beautiful portrait of Lucrezia Borgia, by Bartolomeo Veneto. A legend reads:

LEGEND

Lucrezia Borgia lived out her life as Duchess of Ferrara, patroness of the arts, and of the poet Pietro Bembo.

INT. ST PETER'S. DAY.

The papal crown is placed on Della Rovere's head. Surrounding him, all of the magnificent pomp of the Renaissance Papacy. A choir sings a Magnificat.

IT DISSOLVES INTO –

The portrait of Pope Julius, by Raphael. A legend reads:

LEGEND

Cardinal Della Rovere became Pope Julius the Second. He commissioned the Sistine Chapel from Michelangelo and the rebuilding of St. Peter's into the basilica that still stands today.

THE END.

