

DAVINCI'S DEMONS

"The Hanged Man"

Written by

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INT. MITHRAEUM - NIGHT

We are in a shadowy cave. CANDLES burn before an ALTAR featuring a winged, LION-HEADED FIGURE with twin serpents coiled around it. An AGING TURKISH MAN sits before it, motioning to a water pipe.

AL-RAHIM

Will you smoke with me, DaVinci?

LEONARDO DAVINCI (25), fit and handsome, sits opposite him.

DAVINCI

That depends on what's in the pipe.

AL-RAHIM

A mixture of tobacco and black hellebore. The flower is mildly poisonous and is rumored to induce visions and summon demons.

DAVINCI

I believe in neither.

AL-RAHIM

Then why do you struggle so hard to keep them both at bay?

(off DaVinci's unease)

Demons exist. You'd be wise to embrace them.

Al-Rahim brings the mouth-piece to his lips and inhales deeply. He then passes it to DaVinci, who follows suit.

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)

History is a lie that has been honed like a weapon by people who have suppressed the truth. Centuries from now, your own history will also be suppressed.

DAVINCI

To what end?

AL-RAHIM

The knowledge you are destined to learn will upend the established order of things.

DAVINCI

How could you possibly know that?

AL-RAHIM

You've heard the phrase 'time is a river'? What most fail to grasp is that the river is circular. In this way, the future is a book that can be read like any other.

(beat)

One man's death opens the doorway for the birth of the next. Would you like to know how this particular doorway opened?

DaVinci slowly nods, apprehensive. Al-Rahim seems pleased.

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)

Be forewarned, then. Some doorways lead into darkness.

EXT. SFORZA CASTLE - DAWN

To establish. A formidable castle. CHURCH BELLS are ringing.

SUPER TITLE: "MILAN - FOUR DAYS EARLIER"

INT. SFORZA CASTLE - THE DUKE'S BED CHAMBER - DAWN

A NAKED MAN pisses into a chamber pot. This is GALEAZZO SFORZA (30s), Duke of Milan. Nursing a hangover. Sforza yawns and pulls back a curtain, flooding the room with light.

ON THE CANOPIED BED,

A TEENAGED BOY tangled in the sheets. Sforza whisks them away, tossing some crumpled clothes at him.

SFORZA

Out you go, boy! Get on with you!

The boy quickly gathers his things and hustles towards the bedchamber door. But as he reaches for the handle --

SFORZA (CONT'D)

Not that way, fool! Would you have the entire household know I'm bugging the Cardinal's nephew?

Sforza pulls on a mounted bracket, opening a spring-latched panel leading to a SECRET PASSAGE at the back of the room.

As the boy slips into the passage, Sforza SLAPS him on the rump. Then, as an afterthought, he flings some coins at him. Sforza closes the panel and opens the bedchamber door.

SFORZA (CONT'D)

CICCO!

CICCO SIMONETTA (60s), the Duke's sober chancellor appears.

SFORZA (CONT'D)

What day is it?

CICCO

December 26th.

Sforza blinks back at him, uncomprehending.

CICCO (CONT'D)

St. Stephen's Day. High Mass was to commence ten minutes ago. The Duchess and your children are already waiting at the Church.

SFORZA

Balls.

(hopefully)

Could you round me up some coddled eggs? I have a beastly hangover and my bowels are in a tumble.

Cicco responds with a withering stare. Sforza relents.

SFORZA (CONT'D)

Right. Be dressed in but a moment.

The Duke steps away and we note a RING on Cicco's finger, bearing the same lion-headed figure that was on the altar.

EXT. STREETS OF MILAN - DAY

Sforza, having rallied and dressed in his finery, hurries to the Gothic church with Cicco and his BODYGUARDS in tow.

INT. CHURCH OF SANTO STEFANO - DAY

As CHURCHGOERS enter, they are frisked for weapons at the door. Among them; THREE NOBLEMEN, who appear to have nothing on them other than their MISSALS and a CRUCIFIX.

The men open their missals. Each missal contains a thin, METAL PAGE with a triangular design stamped into it. The men pop the triangles from the pages like puzzle pieces.

Then, with practiced efficiency, the pieces are snapped together to form a PYRAMIDAL-SHAPED DAGGER BLADE.

VISCONTI, the group's leader, removes his crucifix and screws it into the base of the blade, creating the dagger's "hilt".

SFORZA (O.S.)

At ease, people! I've arrived!

All heads turn as Sforza enters. He smiles, glad-handing -- avoiding eye-contact with his furious wife, BONA. As he nears the Point of the Innocents, Visconti approaches as if to embrace him. Sforza waves him off, whispering:

SFORZA (CONT'D)

Begone, you artless fuckwit. This is my moment.

VISCONTI

And thanks to the Secret Archives, it's the last you will ever enjoy!

Visconti THRUSTS the dagger into Sforza's throat. Sforza sinks to his knees, BLOOD fountaining from his throat. As Sforza's bodyguards rush forward, mayhem consumes the church.

EXT. HILLS ABOVE FLORENCE - DAY

We are at the edge of dramatic cliff overlooking Florence. It is windy and HAWKS can be seen riding the thermals.

VANESSA (O.S.)

Tell me a secret, Leonardo.

ANGLE ON LEONARDO DAVINCI

Tall, handsome, stylish, with an insatiable curiosity. At the moment, he is SKETCHING someone with his RIGHT HAND --

VANESSA (19), a buxom beauty, WHO POSES NAKED on a rock. Her hair is braided with ribbons and blows in the wind. Behind them is a wagon containing a LARGE OBJECT beneath a tarp.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

What was your earliest memory? Or better yet, your greatest fear?

DaVinci checks an HOURGLASS beside him. He reaches for a glass of wine with his RIGHT HAND, then starts a NEW SKETCH of Vanessa with his LEFT HAND.

DAVINCI

In my case, the two go hand in hand.
I was six months old.

VANESSA

No one remembers back that far.

DAVINCI

I am unique in that regard. My mother put me in a cradle out in the field. She left me for a moment and a hawk flew down. It perched there, looking at me. Almost as if it were trying to reveal some kind of mystery.

VANESSA

Regarding what?

DAVINCI

I never found out. My mother threw a stone at the bird and drove it away. Yet as clear as that memory is; the one aspect I can never properly recall is my mother's face.

(a stark confession)

I can draw anything I've seen, even in passing. But when it comes to my mother, all I see is a void.

VANESSA

Surely you've seen her since --

DAVINCI

No. She disappeared that night. And I've been trying to recall her face ever since.

VANESSA

Well, if that's your innermost secret, you're not so unique. All men are searching for their mothers. That's what guides you between our thighs.

DAVINCI

I pay you to pose, Vanessa. Not plumb the depths of my character.

VANESSA

Yes, well, my particular brand of posing comes with a surcharge of pillow talk. So tell me -- is there nothing else you fear?

DAVINCI
Only imperfection, Sister.

DaVinci eyes his sketch. Though it's a perfect likeness, he CRUMPLES it up. For he is plagued by the knowledge that much of what he *conceives* will never be *properly executed*. Then:

NICO (O.S.)
Maestro!

A breathless twelve year-old crests the path behind them. This is NICO MACHIAVELLI, DaVinci's exuberant apprentice. DaVinci glances at his hourglass. The sands have all fallen.

DAVINCI
You're late, Nico.

NICO
What? You're the one that's late.
Verrocchio's been looking
everywhere for you --

DAVINCI
As are my creditors and the shopkeep
from whom I liberated this chianti.
They can wait. We've an experiment
to conduct and you're meant to play
a principle role in it. Come --

But Nico is frozen, staring at Vanessa's naked form.

VANESSA
Hello.

DAVINCI
They're called breasts, Nico.
Every woman possesses them.

DaVinci heads for the wagon, tugging Nico along.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
Vanessa's on loan to me from the
Santa Maria convent. I needed
someone to do light studies on.

NICO
Did the Abbess know she'd --

DAVINCI
-- have her generous mounds
flapping about in the wind? No.
Nor does she know that her charge's
virginity is no longer, in the
strictest legal sense, *intact*.
(MORE)

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 But who will tell her? Help me
 with these ropes.

DaVinci unties the canvas shroud, and with Nico's help,
 quickly pulls it from the wagon bed, revealing --

A LARGE, BAT-WINGED "KITE",

Constructed of linen stretched on a wooden frame.
 Essentially, a Renaissance hang-glider. The kite is attached
 via rope to a hand-cranked drum mounted onto the wagon bed.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 How much do you weigh, Nico? About
 ninety-four pounds?

Nico eyes the device with growing unease.

NICO
 Ninety-six, I think.

DAVINCI
 Close enough. Climb into that
 harness, would you?

Nico reluctantly climbs up and begins harnessing himself in.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 Today, we are attempting to
 ascertain whether or not this kite
 can provide the necessary wind-
 resistance to support your weight.

NICO
 What if it can't?

DAVINCI
 Then your noble sacrifice will amend
 Aristotle's treatise on gravity.
 (calling to Vanessa)
 Vanessa, would you mind prancing
 about for a moment?

Vanessa complies, happily pirouetting about as the wind whips
 her beribboned hair to and fro. DaVinci seems pleased.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 You see, Nico? Those weighted
 ribbons allow me to calculate the
 strength and direction of the wind --
 (squinting as he thinks)
 In this case, I'd say about twenty
 knots, and shifting westerly, which
 will require a slight adjustment --

DaVinci SLAPS the horse, guiding the wagon towards the cliff.

NICO

Wait, WAIT! What if your
calculations are wrong?

A GUST OF WIND catches the kite's "wings", lifting Nico from the wagon. He SCREAMS and the rope begins uncoiling. DaVinci cranks the drum. The kite rises thirty feet.

VANESSA

You're flying, Nico!

But now, the drum is spinning so fast that DaVinci can't keep up with it. Worse, friction is creating WISPS OF SMOKE.

Alarmed, DaVinci activates a HAND-BRAKE, but the device FAILS. He looks about the wagon, forced to improvise. Then he seizes a SWORD and DRIVES it cross-wise through the drum.

The rope stops unspooling. With an effort, DaVinci reels Nico back in. Once Nico is safely back in the wagon, he quickly unbuckles himself. DaVinci claps him on the shoulder.

DAVINCI

Welcome back to terra firma, Nico!

Nico smiles, feeling faint. DaVinci sniffs the air, then looks to Nico's crotch.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

It would appear you pissed yourself
while you were aloft, Nico.

Nico looks down. Indeed, he has. He looks up, embarrassed.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

No worries. I brought an extra
pair of leggings just in case.

DaVinci reaches into the wagon, producing a pair of leggings. He tosses them at Nico, then smiles at Vanessa.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

Shall we be off, then, Sister?

EXT. STREETS OF FLORENCE/OLD MARKET - DAY

DaVinci and Nico lead the horse-drawn wagon through the chaotic streets. There are VENDORS hawking their wares from stalls. BEGGARS, GUILDSMEN, MERCHANTS riding donkeys.

ON THE DOCKS AT THE ARNO RIVER,

A ship has come in. VISITORS from foreign lands disembark, including a tall, TURKISH MAN (50s), shrouded in a blue robe.

Nico takes it all in, wide-eyed, frequently dodging around obstacles. Just then, a STRAY PIG races by, knocking him on his ass. As he sits, he notices that he's fallen in shit.

NICO

God I hate this place --

DAVINCI

Where else could we practice our flights but in Florence?

DaVinci helps Nico up. They keep moving.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

Any other city, we'd be burnt at the stake for our efforts. But here? I'm just another free-thinking heretic amongst the whores and reprobates. Chaos, culture, it's all celebrated within these walls. Florence only demands one thing of its people; to be truly awake.
(stopping in mid-stride)
Like that angelic vision. I'd pay good money to disturb her slumber --

ANGLE ON LUCREZIA DONATI (20S),

Trailed by a coterie of SERVANTS clutching bundles of flowers. Lucrezia is stunning.

NICO

Keep walking, Maestro. That's Lucrezia Donati.
(off DaVinci's look)
Lorenzo Medici's mistress? He'll break you on the wheel if he so much as catches you looking at her.

DaVinci keeps gazing at her, smitten. And then, for an instance, Lucrezia's eyes connect with his. He LAUGHS.

DAVINCI

What if she's caught looking at me?

Just then, a COMMOTION draws their attention as a MERCENARY, bearing a BLUE SERPENT on his surcoat, GALLOPS by them, his horse in a frenzied lather. The mercenary reins in his steed just in front of the Medici Palace.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 (his brow furrowing)
 Bad tidings from Milan, Nico.

NICO
 How can you tell?

DAVINCI
 That serpent on the rider's surcoat
 is the *Biscione*, the Sforza family
 emblem. If he was bringing *good*
 news, he would have dressed in the
 more traditional red and white
 shield of Milan.
 (pondering)
 No, whatever the message is, Lorenzo
 won't be happy with it.

INT. MEDICI PALACE - ARCADE - DAY

The rider is lead by SERVANTS through the bustling courtyard --

INT. MEDICI PALACE - COUNTING HOUSE - DAY

-- into an inner-sanctum housing scores of CLERKS. This is
 the heart of the Medici banking empire. Abaci beads CLACK as
 COINS are counted, recorded in ledgers, and stored in caskets.

ANGLE ON LORENZO MEDICI (30),

de facto ruler of Florence. Despite having the face of a
 boxer, Lorenzo is a shrewd and sober man, who dresses simply.

His brother, GIULIANO (26), is the opposite; handsome,
 dashing, flamboyant. Hovering between these two polarities is
 GENTILE BECCHI (50s), Lorenzo's humorless advisor.

The rider presents Lorenzo with a wax sealed scroll. Lorenzo
 reads it, then erupts from his chair, KICKING OVER a chest.

LORENZO
 Out! OUT!!! All of you!

The money counters exit. Lorenzo paces, grave.

LORENZO (CONT'D)
 The Duke of Milan is dead.
 Assassinated.

BECCHI
 By whose hand?

LORENZO
Visconti and two others.

GIULIANO
(derisively)
An honor killing, then. They say
the Duke *deflowered* his niece.
Sforza was a pig of epic appetites.

LORENZO
But he was our pig. And his armies
were the only thing keeping Rome's
ambitions in check.
(shaking his head)
This was no honor killing. I sense
the Vatican's hand behind this.

BECCHI
If you're right, this will upset the
balance of power in Italy, Lorenzo.

LORENZO
Upset? My God, Becchi. This all
but decapitates the concept and
shits down its throat!

Lorenzo collapses back into his chair, disheartened.

LORENZO (CONT'D)
We need to shore up public support.
Carnival is nearly upon us.

GIULIANO
Drunken revelry? That's how we
handle this?

BECCHI
The bigger the celebration, the
stronger we appear. It's all part
of the pantomime.

LORENZO
Pageantry's all well and good, but if
our pomp has no teeth behind it, we
might as well slit our own throats.

SIXTUS (PRELAP)
Are you frightened?

INT. PAPAL APARTMENTS - BATH AREA - NIGHT

POPE SIXTUS IV (60s), avaricious and corpulent, with a face
like a manatee, floats in a bath of rose petals.

A YOUNG MAN rests in the water alongside him. Sixtus has a delicate knife pressed against the poor youth's throat.

YOUNG MAN
No, Most Holy Father.

SIXTUS
Lying is a sin, my dear boy. It separates us from God's grace.

YOUNG MAN
I --
(correcting himself)
Yes, I'm frightened --

Sixtus reaches his free hand between the boy-man's legs.

SIXTUS
But that's also a lie, isn't it?
At least, a *partial* one. A venial sin, perhaps.
(pressing the knife deeper)
So which statement is correct?

Now the youth is terrified. He doesn't know how to answer.

SIXTUS (CONT'D)
Speak, child. Don't you wish to enter Heaven?

The youth stammers, dry-mouthed. Sixtus' eyes are alight with mischievous delight. He moves his face closer to the youth's, until their lips are nearly touching, and whispers:

SIXTUS (CONT'D)
The proper answer would be --

Just then, we hear a COMMOTION outside the room as --

SWISS GUARD (O.S.)
Your Graces, his Holiness has forbidden --

-- the DOORS BURST OPEN and THREE MEN enter, having bullied their way past the SWISS MERCENARIES standing guard.

First is COUNT RIARIO (30s), nephew of Sixtus. Handsome, sadistic, suffering from the kind of insecurity endemic to those recently vaulted into society's ranks. Then --

FRANCESCO PAZZI (30s), Papal banker. Short, slender, and pale. A schemer who perceives insult at every turn.

Next is LUPO MERCURI (50s), Curator of the Secret Archives.

MERCURI

Our men succeeded! Sforza's dead.

At this, Sixtus removes the knife, heaving his bulk from the bath like a walrus beaching itself on a rocky shoal. Mercuri and the others seem unfazed by what they've stumbled in on.

FRANCESCO

Florence is ripe for the picking,
your Eminence. Trust me.

SIXTUS

And you know this *how*, Francesco --?

RIARIO

We have an agent within Lorenzo's
ranks. The Medicis are desperate.
They've increased the carnival
budget tenfold in a pathetic bid to
win the peoples' favor.

(forcefully)

They're weak, your Holiness! This
is your chance to strike.

SIXTUS

Not *mine*, nephew. The Lord's.

RIARIO

Of course. Forgive the imprecision
of my words.

MERCURI

There is another reason for haste.
(off their looks)
The Turk has arrived in Florence.
He's after the Book of Leaves.

The news galvanizes Sixtus. He nods, shrugging on a robe, hurrying from the chambers. After a beat, Riario looks to --

-- the youth, sunk low in the bath, trying to make himself inconspicuous.

RIARIO

I'm sorry.

YOUNG MAN

Why --?

RIARIO

Because you can't have heard this.

Riario picks up the knife and SLASHES the boy's throat.

The boy sinks face-first amongst the rose petals, his BLOOD spreading like an ink blot.

EXT. VERROCCHIO'S STUDIO - VIA DELL' AGNOLO - DAY

A *bottega* with opening onto the busy street. CHILDREN scamper outside as dogs, pigs, and chickens wander freely about.

INT. VERROCCHIO'S STUDIO - GROUND FLOOR - DAY

An industrious workshop manned by APPRENTICES, crowded with easels, sculptor's turntables, and firing kilns.

ANDREA "TRUE EYE" VERROCCHIO (40S),

DaVinci's mentor and friend, hovers at the back. He seems pained and apologetic, doing his best to appease --

-- Gentile Becchi and Giuliano Medici, who look annoyed.

GIULIANO

Do you have the plans for the *columbina* or not?

VERROCCHIO

We do. And they're breathtaking.
I put my finest man on the job.

BECCHI

Then produce these miraculous renderings and let us evaluate them.

VERROCCHIO

Unfortunately, I can't.

GIULIANO

Because they don't exist!

Giuliano grabs Verrocchio by his collar, drawing him close.

GIULIANO (CONT'D)

By God, man, if you think you can defraud the House of Medici --

VERROCCHIO

No, no, no, they exist, I promise you! They're in this chest!

Verrocchio gestures to a LARGE TRUNK, secured at the front with an elaborate, multi-dial COMBINATION LOCK.

BECCHI

Open it.

VERROCCHIO

I can't. It's locked.

GIULIANO

(unsheathing his sword)

Then I'll take my sword to it --

Verrocchio and his staff shrink back in fear, SCREAMING.

VERROCCHIO

WAIT!!!

Giuliano stays his hand. Verrocchio looks like he's about to have a stroke. He dabs his brow with a handkerchief.

VERROCCHIO (CONT'D)

The chest has been rigged to explode if anyone tampers with it.

GIULIANO

Are you mad? Why would anyone engineer such an infernal contrivance?!

DAVINCI (O.S.)

To protect my ideas, obviously.

CLOSE ON DaVinci, just now entering, tailed by Nico. Upon seeing them, Verrocchio's face floods with relief.

VERROCCHIO

Gentlemen, Leonardo DaVinci.

BECCHI

Your "finest man", I take it?
(sizing DaVinci up)
I've heard of you. They say you're quite the free thinker.

DAVINCI

I'm not sure who "they" are, but I'm happy to accept the distinction, even if it was delivered somewhat disingenuously.

DaVinci sweeps past them, drawing near Verrocchio, who hisses:

VERROCCHIO

You're late.

DaVinci smiles back at him, as if to say "I've got this."
Then he CLAPS his hands, launching into presentation mode.

DAVINCI

So! The First Citizen of Florence
is desperate for us to fashion a
columbina. Is that correct?

BECCHI

Desperate is a strong word.

DAVINCI

And yet it happens to be the word I
used. So let's review. Every Easter,
a grand procession makes its way
through the streets, terminating at
the cathedral, where Mass is held --

GIULIANO

Why do you insist on stating what
every child of three already knows?

DAVINCI

Why do you insist on interrupting
me? I have a methodology. We can
follow it. Or we can flail about.
Which avenue do you prefer?

Giuliano stares at DaVinci, momentarily flummoxed.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

I'll take your silence as a vote
for the former. So, onward. At
the culmination of Mass, a
mechanical dove, the *Columbina*, is
flown from the altar on a wire --

DaVinci leaps onto a workbench, pantomiming wings.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

Out into the public square it
soars, igniting a cart full of
fireworks! The Republic
celebrates, donning masks, engaging
in drunken revelry. For years,
the House of Medici has contracted
with *inferior* workshops to produce
the ceremonial dove.

(advancing on Becchi)

But this year, if I'm to understand
the politics afoot, the same, shoddy
pageantry just won't do.

GIULIANO

No one's carped about our dove before.

DAVINCI

To call your previous efforts a "dove" is to insult the entire avian class. I'm offering to fashion you something much more *sublime*.

BECCHI

Enough! Show us the damn thing!

DaVinci kneels and deftly manipulates the lock. As it unlatches, the others back away, expecting an explosion --

-- but nothing happens. Instead, DaVinci pulls out the most beautiful ARTIFICIAL DOVE the world has ever seen.

DAVINCI

Of course, this is but a quarter-scale model.

BECCHI

It's astonishingly life-like. I'll grant you that.

DAVINCI

It can be yours for thirty florins.

GIULIANO

Thirty? The contract stated twelve.

DAVINCI

Ah. But that was for a bird that needed a *guide-wire*. This miracle requires no such handicap.

DaVinci triggers an internal spring. The dove circles the workshop before landing in his hands. The workers APPLAUD.

BECCHI

Your work is impressive. But the price is too steep.

DAVINCI

The Medici require a show of power this Easter. Something that will astound the public and assure them that Florence is secure. Thirty florins is a bargain.

GIULIANO

Thirty florins is sodomy!

DAVINCI

Perhaps I should be negotiating
with your older brother instead.

Verrocchio winces. Giuliano reaches for his sword as if to strike DaVinci -- but he relents, reining himself in.

GIULIANO

For God's sakes, Becchi! Just pay
the degenerate and be done with it!

Giuliano leaves in a huff. Becchi pulls out a coin purse.

BECCHI

You win, *artista*. As is customary
with commissions, we shall pay half
now and half upon completion.

DAVINCI

While we're on the subject of
commissions, I'm told there's an
open one to paint Lorenzo's
mistress, Lucrezia Donati?

BECCHI

Even if Lorenzo had a mistress, which
I strenuously deny, what of it?

DAVINCI

I'd like to nominate myself as a
candidate.

BECCHI

Signora Donati is one of the most
revered women in Florence. As such,
the commission is reserved for
registered members of the Guild.

Becchi offers a cadaverous smile.

BECCHI (CONT'D)

Stick to your whirligigs and
parlour tricks, DaVinci.

And with that, Becchi exits. But we can tell from the look in DaVinci's eyes that he's not about to let it go.

INT. VERROCCHIO'S STUDIO - LIVING QUARTERS - DAY

Moments later, Verrocchio and DaVinci are in the loft overlooking the workshop. DaVinci seems distracted.

VERROCCHIO

You push too hard, Leonardo.

DAVINCI

That's the thanks I get for doubling our rate?

VERROCCHIO

You're missing the point. You're an artist, not a charlatan. It's prestige you should be after. You won't gain it by continually insulting those above your station.

DAVINCI

(taking offense)
My station?

VERROCCHIO

You're a bastard, Leonardo. Illegitimate. You can't hold office or inherit wealth. You're prohibited from joining any of the major guilds. Your options are limited; mercenary, thief, artisan.

DAVINCI

You forgot begging. I could always take up that. Or prostitution.

Despite the tirade, it's obvious Verrocchio has hit a nerve.

VERROCCHIO

I'm trying to counsel you, Leonardo.

DAVINCI

And if prestige was all I wanted, I'd take it. I want to be a scientist, Andrea. A thinker. I have ideas that need birthing.

VERROCCHIO

The world may not be ready for your ideas, Leonardo.

DAVINCI

Then I'll just have to invent one that is.

INT. VERROCCHIO'S STUDIO - DAVINCI'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

It's late. PAN OVER a host of REVOLUTIONARY DESIGNS; some for inventions we RECOGNIZE. Some lost to history.

DaVinci works, slumped over a table cluttered with designs for the *columbina*, near the point of exhaustion. As we DRIFT CLOSER to him, Vanessa's earlier words echo:

VANESSA'S VOICE
Is there nothing else you fear?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE HILLS OF VINCI - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A memory. The sun is high. A younger Da Vinci (16), climbs a hillside, attempting to round up some wayward SHEEP.

Then he notices a waterfall. And behind it, a CLEFT in the rock. Curious, he climbs up, where he discovers a CAVE. He peers into the darkness. A wind from within stirs his hair. Setting caution aside, he climbs inside.

Time passes. Shadows lengthen and the sun dips. Then --

YOUNG DAVINCI EMERGES

His clothes are torn and his hands are covered with BLOOD. He tries to wipe them on his clothes, but there's too much of it. The boy starts to panic, CRYING OUT, his screams --

INT. VERROCCHIO'S STUDIO - DAVINCI'S QUARTERS - DAWN

-- melding with the adult DaVinci's as he wakes. He looks about, disoriented, trying to recalibrate back to reality.

VERROCCHIO (O.S.)
Are you alright, Leonardo?

DaVinci turns to see Verrocchio in the doorway, concerned.

DAVINCI
Just a nightmare, Andrea.

VERROCCHIO
You have them all too frequently.

DAVINCI
I'm just having some issues with my mathematics, that's all.

He gestures to the *Columbina* designs, and the scale model.

VERROCCHIO
Issues --?

DAVINCI

I'm not sure the Columbina will be flight-worthy by Easter.

VERROCCHIO

But the model --

DAVINCI

-- was a *model*. Once I scale up the dimensions, the calculations don't hold. It's annoying.

Verrochio spots a PIPE and POPPY SEED PODS near DaVinci.

VERROCCHIO

Smoking opium won't help matters.

DAVINCI

It clears my head.

VERROCCHIO

It clouds it.

DAVINCI

What are you, my nursemaid? Yes, it clouds. I think too much, alright?! I need to dull my thoughts or I'll be eviscerated by them. I'd have thought you'd understand that by now!!!

DaVinci sweeps his drawings to the floor, SMASHING bottles. Finally, he flings his scale-model into the fire, watching it burn. He picks up one of the poppy pods.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

The tears of the poppy have medicinal properties. The priests in Egypt knew that --

VERROCCHIO

We are not in Egypt. And you are no priest.

DaVinci's shoulders slump, his rage evaporating into darkness.

VERROCCHIO (CONT'D)

A word of advice --

DAVINCI

I don't want it.

VERROCCHIO

You'll receive it anyway. You have a rare gift, Leo. A kind of genius the likes of which I've never seen. Because of that, people will always seek to destroy you.

(beat)

Don't aid them in that endeavor.

Verrocchio exits. DaVinci turns back to the model of the dove still burning in the fireplace and we --

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF FLORENCE/OLD MARKET - DAY

-- wooden cages, containing every kind of BIRD imaginable, from fowl to songbirds to birds of prey.

REVEAL DaVinci and Nico, browsing the BIRD SELLERS section. DaVinci at a CAGE OF STARLINGS, nodding to the PROPRIETOR:

DAVINCI

How much for the starlings?

BIRD SELLER

Six denari a-piece.

DAVINCI

You'll take two soldi for the whole cage and be happy about it.

BIRD SELLER

Two -- are you trying to offend me?!

DAVINCI

If I wanted to offend you, I'd comment on the scent of fecal matter wafting from your hind quarters. Do you want the soldi or not? They're my last and I'm getting bored.

DaVinci reaches into his belt purse, producing the soldi. The vendor offers him the cage, but DaVinci shakes his head.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

I'm only interested in the birds. Just open the cage on my say-so.

DaVinci opens his notebook, pulling out a sketch pencil that.

NICO
 (explaining to the vendor)
 He's obsessed with flight. He
 studies them for inspiration.

DaVinci nods to the vendor, who opens the cage.

The starlings take to the air in slow-motion and we shift into "DA VINCI VISION". A kind of wire-frame overlay appears atop the birds, outlining the MECHANICS of their flight. For this is another of Da Vinci's gifts; the ability to perceive the inner workings of virtually any mechanism.

DaVinci records every detail, quickly rendering a series of perfect studies. And then, the spell is broken as --

BIRD SELLER
 Well? Did you see what you were
 hoping to?

DAVINCI
 For one of my soldis back, I just
 might tell you.

DaVinci leaves the vendor, his attention now drawn to --

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 Look, Nico. There she is again --

LUCREZIA DONATI,

Again making her rounds with her servants. As we watch, her group encounters another, exchanging pleasantries with --

LORENZO MEDICI,

Holding court, surrounded by FAVOR SEEKERS and BODYGUARDS.

NICO
 And there's Lorenzo Medici, too.
 You'd best keep moving.

Nico tugs at his sleeve, but DaVinci stays put, watching --

DAVINCI
 Look at them, both behaving with
 perfect composure. Surrounded by
 parasites. Everyone pretending the
 two of them aren't fucking.

NICO
 Isn't that your father with them?

As Nico points out PIERO DAVINCI (50s), a serious-minded man in robes, DaVinci's face clouds over with a storm of emotions.

DAVINCI

The Crown Prince of parasites. He serves as Lorenzo's notary.

(then, impulsively)

Let's stir the pot a little, Nico.

As DaVinci stalks towards the group, Piero spots him, his mouth curling into a frown. The bodyguards stiffen, alert for trouble. But DaVinci ignores them, grinning broadly.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

Your Magnificence!

Lorenzo breaks off his conversation, regarding DaVinci.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

My name is Leonardo DaVinci. Perhaps you've heard of me? I am designing your Easter *columbina*.

LORENZO

Aren't you the eccentric Verrocchio employs?

DAVINCI

I am an artist, yes. And an engineer of some note.

LORENZO

Really? "Extortionist" was the phrase I heard Gentile Becchi using.

Lorenzo's entourage LAUGHS. But DaVinci presses on.

DAVINCI

I drive a stiff bargain, it's true. But the fact is, I've designed a more ambitious series of devices that I know your percipient mind will take interest in --

As DaVinci reaches for his notebook, CAPTAIN DRAGONETTI, leader of the Companions of the Night (Florence's secret police), steps forward, threatening.

DRAGONETTI

Move along, citizen.

DaVinci reads the implicit violence in Dragonetti's face and slowly closes his notebook. Lorenzo offers a polite smile --

LORENZO

Some other time, perhaps.

-- and continues on his way. His retinue follows suit, with Piero casting a meaningful glower back at his son. Then Lucrezia, offering a final, furtive glance.

DAVINCI

(simmering)

I'm wounded, Nico. I need wine.

NICO

You said you were out of money.

DAVINCI

I lied.

INT. BARKING DOG - NIGHT

A noisy establishment, populated by Florence's SEEDIER ELEMENTS. DaVinci holds court in back, drinking with Nico --

AND ZOROASTER (20S),

A self-professed occultist and scoundrel. Also, DaVinci's best friend. Currently indulging in a plate of sausages.

DAVINCI

How goes business, Zoroaster?

ZOROASTER

Execrable since the Duke's demise. These are dark times for Florence.

Just then, a SQUABBLE breaks out amongst a GROUP OF SOLDIERS. A PUNCH or two is thrown, a man goes down. LAUGHTER ensues.

ZOROASTER (CONT'D)

Case in point. Those mercenaries flooding into town. If war breaks out, they'll be the only ones gainfully employed.

(shifting gears)

And speaking of employment, a two-headed calf was still-born on Zitto's farm. I can procure it, if you like. For your medical studies.

DAVINCI

The last corpse you brought me was already decomposing by the time I took a scalpel to it.

ZOROASTER
 Grave-robbing is like fish-
 mongering. Sometimes, you're at
 the mercy of the day's catch.

Zoroaster spears his last sausage, offering it to DaVinci.

ZOROASTER (CONT'D)
 Boar sausage?

DAVINCI
 You know damn well I'm a vegetarian.

ZOROASTER
 Yet I keep hoping to corrupt you.

DAVINCI
 I'm corruptible. I just prefer not
 to eat anything with eyes.

NICO
 Potatoes have eyes.

ZOROASTER
 Oh, fuck-off! Who asked you, anyway?

Zoroaster produces a deck of hand-painted TAROT CARDS.

ZOROASTER (CONT'D)
 Here. Have you seen these?
 (fanning them out face-up)
 They're called *tarot* cards.
 They're used to divine fortunes.

As Zoroaster collects and shuffles the cards, DaVinci notes --

THREE NEW ARRIVALS

Captain Dragonetti and two of his Officers of the Night,
 prowling the bar and generally intimidating customers.

Zoroaster sets the shuffled deck FACE-DOWN, nods to Nico --

ZOROASTER (CONT'D)
 Pick one, Nico. We'll see if it
 squares with your temperament.

Nico selects a card and turns it over: THE FOOL.

NICO
 It's a trick.

ZOROASTER

Is it? Or am I simply channeling
the powers of the Ancients?

DAVINCI

How many women has that line worked
on, Zo?

ZOROASTER

A respectable amount. And a goodly
number of gentlemen as well. Your
turn, Leo. Don't be shy.

DaVinci selects a card. But he doesn't yet turn it over.

DAVINCI

I already know what it is. It's
the Devil card, obviously.

DaVinci turns it over. And so it is. Nico is impressed.

ZOROASTER

Well done. But a card can symbolize
not just one's temperament, but his
future. Do you dare see yours, Leo?

DaVinci picks a new card: THE HANGED MAN. Zoroaster frowns.

DAVINCI

Tell me. Don't hold back.

ZOROASTER

This one represents sacrifice.
Suspension between life and death.
And then, perhaps, a great awakening.

But DaVinci seems distracted as an idea forms in his mind.

DAVINCI

I'm an idiot.

DaVinci nods towards the previously mentioned mercenaries.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

Those mercenaries. They've come to
sell their muscle, right? The
people of Florence want assurances
that Rome won't be storming the
city gates. But what if there were
a more lucrative way to traffic in
the Republic's unease?

NICO

Like what?

DAVINCI
How do we attract patrons?

DaVinci takes out his notebook, flipping to his *columbina*.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
With art. Take my *columbina*. It's beautiful. But it's ephemeral. And honestly, who cares about art when their farm is about to be burnt down and their daughters sodomized? So how does one really achieve immortality?

Nico shrugs. Zoroaster is equally puzzled.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
By selling an idea. Aristotle, Plato, Socrates. They laid down a set of principles, which then propagated outward through history.

ZOROASTER
No one wants your principles, Leo. They barely want your art.

DAVINCI
But what if those principles could make them feel safe at night?

ZOROASTER
What do you have in mind, Leo? A chastity belt for the anus?

DAVINCI
I should be promoting myself as a *military engineer*, not a painter. War's always been the hand-maiden of progress. If I want to explore my ideas, I just have to cloak them in the guise of Florence's defense.

Just then, a new HUBBUB draws their attention.

ANGLE ON "THE TURK" (50S),

(Sharp-eyed viewers saw him disembark from the ship earlier.)
Dragonetti and his men are harassing the scholar.

NICO
Why are the Night Watch bothering that old man?

ZOROASTER

He's a Turk. Isn't that crime
enough?

Dragonetti knocks the Turk's drink from his hands and begins
shoving him. DaVinci's face hardens as he watches.

ZOROASTER (CONT'D)

This isn't your fight, Leo.

DAVINCI

When has that ever stopped me?

ZOROASTER

(to Nico)

He always courts danger when he's
drunk.

DaVinci pushes himself into the center of the fray.

DAVINCI

What seems to be the trouble here?

DRAGONETTI

Go back to your sketchbook,
scribbler. This isn't your concern.

DAVINCI

Unfortunately, I have a character
flaw that compels me to intervene
whenever stupidity rears its head.

BLACK MARTIN, one of Dragonetti's men, draws his sword,
threatening DaVinci --

-- who deftly traps the man's hand, twists it, and transfers
the sword to his OWN HAND in the blink of an eye. He thrusts
it forward, giving a pin-prick touch to Martin's forehead.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

There, you see? That was stupid.
Your man's grip was too loose and
now he finds himself staring down
this handsome *spada filo*.

MORGANTE, Dragonetti's second man, tries to engage DaVinci --

-- but DaVinci moves like lightning, drawing a DAGGER with
his left hand, parrying the man's sword, then SLASHING his
cheek. Morgante CRIES OUT, clutching his face.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 More stupidity. If you'd asked
 around, you'd know I'm ambidextrous
 and perfectly capable of fighting
 two --

(pointedly)
 -- or even three men simultaneously.

Dragonetti pauses, hand on his sword hilt. Although DaVinci is smiling, the look in his eyes tells us he means business.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 Bully someone else, Dragonetti.

Dragonetti glances about. The whole tavern is watching.

DRAGONETTI
 You've made a serious
 miscalculation tonight, *artista*.

DAVINCI
 It wouldn't be the first time.

Dragonetti gestures to his men, who back away. The trio exit, enduring a CHORUS OF CATCALLS. DaVinci looks to the Turk.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 Are you alright, Sir?

TURK
 I am more than alright. "I am a son
 of Earth and Starry Heaven."

DaVinci blinks. That was a odd reply. The Turk reaches into his robe, retrieving a COIN, which he hands to DaVinci.

TURK (CONT'D)
 I return to Constantinople the day
 after tomorrow. But I am staying
 at the Inn of the Black Swan. Come
 see me before I go, Maestro.

And with that, the Turk exits. Nico and Zoroaster approach.

ZOROASTER
 Well that was certainly bizarre.
 What did he give you?

DaVinci looks down at the coin, perplexed. A strange symbol is embossed on it: a winged man with a lion's head and twin serpents coiled around him.

DAVINCI
 A tip, I think.

EXT. FLORENCE STREETS - NIGHT

DaVinci and Nico traverse the empty streets, supporting an extremely drunk Zoroaster between them. As they reach an intersection, DaVinci transfers Zoroaster's weight to Nico.

DAVINCI

Take him, Nico. He won't make it home alone.

NICO

Are you *sure*, maestro? There are bound to be rogues about.

DAVINCI

Then I'll fit right in. Go on.

Nico nods. But as he starts away, Zoroaster briefly stirs from his stupor. He looks at DaVinci, his speech slurred.

ZOROASTER

Leo --?

DAVINCI

Yes, my friend?

ZOROASTER

I didn't deal you the Hanged Man. That was all you. It was an omen. Just like the two-headed calf.

DAVINCI

I don't believe in omens, Zo. And neither should you.

ZOROASTER

-- okay --

As Nico heads off, struggling beneath Zoroaster's uncooperative weight, DaVinci smiles. He turns into an alley, WHISTLING to himself. Then he stops --

A HOODED FIGURE

Steps from the shadows, sword in hand, radiating menace. DaVinci is briefly alarmed, then relaxes as he realizes:

DAVINCI

I know it's you, Dragonetti.
(drawing his dagger)
Didn't you learn anything earlier?
I'll wipe the gutters with you.

Then, a DOZEN MORE HOODED FIGURES emerge from the shadows.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 Oh. I guess you did learn.

EXT. THE BARGELLO - NIGHT

An imposing, crenelated fortress, housing both the offices of the magistrate and its prison. SCREAMS echo from within.

INT. BARGELLO DUNGEON - NIGHT

Torch-lit, filled with dank cells and instruments of torture. DaVinci has his hands bound and is getting the shit beaten out of him by Dragonetti and his men. And just when it seems like he can't take it anymore --

 MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 That's enough.

They stop. DaVinci squints, making out a SILHOUETTE in the shadows. One of the Officers sets a chair down and the figure sits. It's DaVinci's father, Piero.

 DAVINCI
 I should have known.

 PIERO
 People are talking about you. And not in a positive light.

 DAVINCI
 I could care less what they're saying about me.

 PIERO
I care!!! Your actions embarrassed me today. I'll not have you tarnishing our family's name with your flippant tone and vulgar attempts at self-promotion.

 DAVINCI
 Then perhaps you should disown me.

 PIERO
 You are my first-born. And as much as I might wish to disavow you, our reputations are intertwined.

 DAVINCI
 First-born? You say that as if --

PIERO
 My wife, Margherita, bore me a son
 this past week.
 (smiling cruelly)
 A legitimate heir.

DaVinci straightens himself, stung.

DAVINCI
 My condolences to him. I wonder
 how long it will take the poor fool
 to curse his lineage?

PIERO
 (his face growing cold)
 Your rank within the social order
 has been rigidly defined. You
 should endeavor to remain within it.
 Stay away from the Medicis,
 Leonardo. I'll not warn you again.

DAVINCI
 And I'll wager you will.

PIERO
 Why do you have to make this all so
 difficult?!

DAVINCI
 It's my nature. I see things as
 they are, and not as they might be.
 Truth compels me to speak.

Piero BACK-HANDS DaVinci across the face.

PIERO
 Speak, then!

DAVINCI
 (wincing, spitting blood)
 You are a petty man --

Piero STRIKES DaVinci again.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 You will never achieve greatness --

Piero STRIKES DaVinci a THIRD TIME.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)
 -- whereas *I*, already *have*.

Piero gestures to the dark, damp environs around them.

PIERO

You are kneeling in a dungeon, about to be hit again and again and again by men who know how to hit. That's what you've achieved, Leonardo.

(to Dragonetti))

Beat him for another hour, then toss him back onto the streets with the rest of the garbage.

As Piero exits, Dragonetti smiles and readies a truncheon --

DRAGONETTI

Hold out the scribbler's hands --

The men comply, forcing DaVinci's bound hands out. As Dragonetti brings his truncheon down, DaVinci SCREAMS.

EXT. OLD MARKET - DAY

CLOSE ON DaVinci, bruised, yet determined. His right hand is a mess, many fingers obviously broken. He sits on a bench, his notebook and sketch pencil at the ready in his LEFT HAND.

Zoroaster and Nico sit beside him. Zoroaster is hung-over.

ZOROASTER

You look more wretched than I.
Perhaps you should see a physician?

DAVINCI

I'm fine.

Zoroaster casts a dubious look at Nico, who shrugs.

ZOROASTER

They're executing a Jew today.
Apparently they caught him breaking into a book shop on the Via Dei Librai. It should be great sport.

DAVINCI

I'm not sure a man's death should be characterized as sport.

ZOROASTER

This spot is too sunny. Can't we move over into the shade?

DAVINCI

No.

NICO

Why? And why did we have to come here so damned early?

DaVinci stares at a fountain that is bracketed by FLOWER VENDORS. As he speaks, a CHURCH BELL tolls --

DAVINCI

Because every morning, at precisely seven a.m., Lucrezia Donati comes to this spot to purchase flowers.

Like clockwork, LUCREZIA and her staff appear. DaVinci begins sketching. He quickly appraises it -- then tosses it away and starts another. Zoroaster glances down at the work.

ZOROASTER

She's appealing. I'll grant you that --

Zoroaster nods to an OLD BEGGAR WOMAN a few yards away.

ZOROASTER (CONT'D)

-- but I'd rather bed that old toothless hag over there.

DAVINCI

Now you're just being contrary.

ZOROASTER

It takes no great skill to fuck a pretty face. But a truly *ugly* woman, *that* actually requires discipline. Done right, it can be a transcendent experience.

TIME SLOWS

Lucrezia moves at a dream-like pace, her beautiful features drenched in sunlight, framed by the riot of colorful flowers --

-- then DaVinci tears a sketch from his notebook. He rolls it into a tube, tying it with a ribbon. He hands it to Nico.

DAVINCI

Run this over and make sure she knows where it came from.

DaVinci and Zoroaster watch as he makes his way to Lucrezia, hands the drawing to her, then gestures back at them.

ZOROASTER

What the devil are you up to, Leo?

Lucrezia studies the drawing. Then she looks up at DaVinci and says something to Nico. He rushes back, excited.

NICO

She wants to speak with you.

DAVINCI

Tell her I'm too busy.

DaVinci starts off in the opposite direction. Zoroaster and Nico follow, confused. In the distance, a TRUMPET sounds.

ZOROASTER

You're turning her down?

DAVINCI

What do you care? Weren't you the one extolling the virtues of transcendent hags? There's a leper over there. Go. Fondle her lesions.

(nodding to Nico)

Tell her, Nico. Timing is all.

Nico rushes off once more. Lucrezia and her ladies are equally baffled by DaVinci's behavior.

MOMENTS LATER,

DaVinci, Zoroaster, and Nico, have joined a CROWD at the Bargello. A gallows has been erected. The HANGMAN readies his noose as a TOWN CRYER continues reeling them in.

Presently, an ox-drawn cart is guided into the square, attended by the MAGISTRATE and a somber procession of ROBED MEN (the Confraternity known as the *Black Company*.)

THE JEW RIDES IN THE CART-BED,

chained, head shaved. The crowd JEERS, throwing fruit at him. As the cart reaches the gallows, the Jew is fitted into the noose. He remains stoic, eyes on the horizon.

DaVinci and Zoroaster angle for a closer view. DaVinci takes out his notebook, sketching the proceedings.

Satisfied with the noose, the Hangman signals the Magistrate. Then something odd happens: the Jew looks directly at DaVinci.

JEW

*I am a son of Earth and Starry
Heaven. I am thirsty. Please give
me something to drink from the
fountain of Memory.*

DaVinci is startled. But there's no time to ponder as the Hangman pulls the lever, letting the Jew drop. The SOUND of his NECK BREAKING is audible. The crowd APPLAUDS.

CLOSE ON DaVinci, shaken. As the crowd disperses, Zoroaster and Nico catch sight of him, registering his odd reaction.

NICO
Are you alright, Maestro?

DAVINCI
I have to go.

And DaVinci hurries off, shoving his way into the crowd.

EXT. INN OF THE BLACK SWAN - DAY

DaVinci spots a wood carved sign and rushes inside.

INT. INN OF THE BLACK SWAN - DAY

At the front desk, DaVinci approaches the INN KEEPER.

DAVINCI
There was a Turk staying here. An elderly gentleman --?

INN KEEPER
He left at dawn.
(as DaVinci's face falls)
Is your name Leonardo?

DAVINCI
Yes.

INN KEEPER
He said you could find him in the in the Roman ruins North of town.

EXT. ROMAN RUINS - DUSK

DaVinci treks to the summit of a hill. Not much to speak of. The remnants of some stone walls and burial niches.

Then DaVinci spies a LANTERN a way's off. He follows it, coming upon a ragged cleft in an old tomb. STEPS lead down into darkness. And within that darkness, ANOTHER LANTERN.

DaVinci pauses. The lanterns are meant to be a path, but the darkness evokes a feeling of dread in him. He descends.

INT. MITHRAEUM - NIGHT

DaVinci finds himself in a cave. CANDLES burn in recesses along the walls. At the far end is an ALTAR, containing --

AN AGED LIMESTONE RELIEF

The LION-HEADED MAN, with the twin serpents coiled around it. It holds a KEY in its right hand and ANOTHER KEY in its left.

THE TURK, "ASLAN AL-RAHIM",

Sits before the altar. He nods to DaVinci and we realize that we have nearly caught up to our opening scene.

AL-RAHIM

My name is Aslan Al-Rahim. Sit, please.

DaVinci takes a seat before Al-Rahim. He nods to the altar --

DAVINCI

That figure --

AL-RAHIM

Will become known to you in time. Will you smoke with me, DaVinci?

Al-Rahim motions to a water pipe beside him; a *Nargile*.

DAVINCI

That depends on what's in the pipe.

AL-RAHIM

A mixture of tobacco and black hellebore. The flower is mildly poisonous and is rumored to induce visions and summon demons.

DAVINCI

I believe in neither.

AL-RAHIM

Then why do you struggle so hard to keep them both at bay?

(off DaVinci's unease)

Demons exist. You'd be wise to embrace them.

Al-Rahim brings the mouth-piece to his lips and inhales deeply. He then passes it to DaVinci, who follows suit.

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)

History is a lie that has been honed like a weapon by people who have suppressed the truth. Centuries from now, your own history will also be suppressed.

DAVINCI

To what end?

AL-RAHIM

The knowledge you are destined to learn will upend the established order of things.

DAVINCI

How could you possibly know that?

AL-RAHIM

You've heard the phrase 'time is a river'? What most fail to grasp is that the river is circular. In this way, the future is a book that can be read like any other.

(beat)

One man's death opens the doorway for the birth of the next. Would you like to know how this particular doorway opened?

DaVinci slowly nods, apprehensive. Al-Rahim seems pleased.

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)

Be forewarned, then. Some doorways lead into darkness.

DAVINCI

I saw a man executed today. He said something to me before he died --

AL-RAHIM

I am a son of Earth and Starry Heaven. I am thirsty. Please give me something to drink from the fountain of Memory.

(beat)

It's an invocation. A way for members of our fraternity to recognize one another.

DAVINCI

I'm not a member of your fraternity.

AL-RAHIM

Are you *sure*?

DaVinci blinks as his surroundings briefly PULSE in and out of focus. The effects of the hellebore are kicking in.

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)

I came to Florence for two reasons. The first was to secure Avraham ben Yosef's release. I failed.

DAVINCI

And the second reason?

AL-RAHIM

Did you really think our meeting at the tavern was a coincidence? I provoked the Officers of the Night in order to observe your behavior.

DAVINCI

And how did I fare?

AL-RAHIM

Like a fool. Your intellect is vastly superior to your peers, yet you needlessly risk it on acts of bravado.

DAVINCI

But I was coming to your aid --

AL-RAHIM

I could have defended myself. You are bright, Leonardo. But you are not yet wise. And there is an ocean of knowledge that remains hidden to you.

Al-Rahim indicates the temple around them.

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)

This temple was a place of worship for a religion that originated long before Christ. Its adherents have largely vanished, but there are still a select few who heed its call.

(beat)

Much of what you call *progress* has simply been a matter of *remembering* what was once *forgotten*.

(MORE)

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)
Many of science's recent
"discoveries" were already known
and codified millennia ago.

Al-Rahim's words take on a trance-like quality as his FACE
BLURS and the candles STROBE.

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)
This knowledge was set down in a
compendium known as the Book of
Leaves. Recently, certain clues
have surfaced regarding the Book's
location. Avraham ben Yosef was
following those clues when he was
apprehended and put to death.

Again, DaVinci blinks. His whole world is upending.

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)
Rome is aware of the Book. Indeed,
they already possess a handful of
its pages. The weapon used to kill
Duke Sforza was engineered using
secrets gleaned from those pages.
Now imagine the knowledge contained
within the entire volume. In the
wrong hands, it could bring about
the end of the world itself.

(beat)

Perhaps you've heard of the Secret
Archives the Vatican has assembled?

DaVinci nods.

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)
In many ways, its agents can be
considered our opposites. Where we
seek to *preserve* and disseminate
knowledge, the Secreta hopes to
alter or suppress it.

DAVINCI

I still don't understand what any
of this has to do with me.

AL-RAHIM

What do you know of your mother?

DAVINCI

Almost nothing. She disappeared.
She was a servant girl, I think --

AL-RAHIM

She was a slave. Brought against her will from Constantinople.

DaVinci stares back at Al-Rahim, stunned.

AL-RAHIM (CONT'D)

An incident occurred when you were young. Something you've repressed?

DaVinci nods, uneasy. How could Al-Rahim know about that?

DAVINCI

I was a boy, back in Vinci --

A MEMORY FLASH ASSAULTS US

DaVinci as a teenager, having gone to fetch his Uncle's sheep. He comes upon the waterfall and the CAVE ENTRANCE.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

As DaVinci's HEARTBEAT quickens, rising in volume.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

I'd been sent to fetch some sheep that wandered off. I found a cave --

ANOTHER MEMORY FLASH

Young DaVinci at the mouth of the cave, peering in.

DAVINCI (V.O.)

I was scared to go inside, but I was curious. So I ventured in.

Young DaVinci enters. We FOLLOW HIM, swallowed by darkness.

NIGHTMARISH IMAGES: SOMETHING MONSTROUS in the shadows. An ALTAR with a LION-HEADED FIGURE. Impressions of VIOLENCE. Coming faster as DaVinci's HEARTBEAT reaches a fever-pitch.

AL-RAHIM

What happened?

DaVinci looks away, frightened, anxious.

DAVINCI

I don't know. The next hours are blank. I remember stumbling out --

BACK IN THE PAST,

Young DaVinci stumbles from the cave in shock, his clothes torn and dirty. His hands and face are covered with BLOOD.

DAVINCI (V.O.)

There was blood on my hands and face. And somehow -- I knew it wasn't my own.

Al-Rahim nods, satisfied with the account. DaVinci is spent, his hands trembling. Al-Rahim speaks softly now:

AL-RAHIM

One day, you will return to that cave and remember the rest. And when you do, we will meet again.

DAVINCI

But -- what am I to do until then?

AL-RAHIM

Search for the Book of Leaves. Fate has chosen you, Leonardo.

DAVINCI

I don't believe in fate.

AL-RAHIM

Then believe in yourself. You followed me here, didn't you?

DAVINCI

Where do I start my search, then?

AL-RAHIM

With the hanged man, obviously. The seat of the soul. You'll find he already opened the door for you.

DAVINCI

And my mother --?

Al-Rahim holds up a HANDFUL OF DUST.

AL-RAHIM

She's waiting for you on the other side. All you need do is enter --

Al-Rahim blows the dust in DaVinci's face. He coughs and tries to rise, alarmed -- and is dragged into unconsciousness.

NICO'S VOICE

Maestro? Can you hear me?

INT. MITHRAEUM - MORNING

FADE IN as DaVinci stirs, his face lit by sunlight from the stairs above. Nico and Zoroaster kneel over him, worried.

DAVINCI

What time is it --?

ZOROASTER

Past noon. We've been looking for you since last night. What happened to you?

DAVINCI

The Turk was here --

DaVinci looks around the cave, but all traces of Al-Rahim are gone; the candles, the pipe, even the altar.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

There was an altar, a statue -- they must've weighed over a ton.

Zoroaster and Nico exchange puzzled looks.

ZOROASTER

This place has been empty for centuries, Leo.

DaVinci rubs his temples, feeling drugged and confused.

NICO

Maestro. The Officers of the Night have been looking for you as well. They say that Lorenzo Medici himself has asked for you.

INT. MEDICI PALACE - ARCADE - DAY

DaVinci, clutching a notebook, is escorted through the arcade by Dragonetti and his men. But he's not being strong-armed.

INT. MEDICI PALACE - COUNTING HOUSE - DAY

DaVinci is lead past the money-counters. Dragonetti stops at a door, nodding for DaVinci to continue. DaVinci studies Dragonetti for clues to his fate, but reads only antagonism.

INT. LORENZO MEDICI'S PRIVATE STUDY - DAY

The study is richly appointed with Flemish tapestries, precious manuscripts, and priceless works of art. A HOODED FALCON rests on a nearby perch.

Lorenzo sits before a roaring fire, writing a letter. Gentile Becchi stands nearby. DaVinci waits, but neither of them says a word. Finally, Lorenzo looks up --

LORENZO

Leonardo di ser Piero DaVinci. I'm told you're my notary's bastard son.

DaVinci hesitates, glancing at Becchi before giving a nod.

DAVINCI

I am.

LORENZO

I'm also told you are a trouble-maker. That you are arrogant, impolitic, and utterly incapable of keeping your opinions to yourself.

DAVINCI

Arrogance implies that I exaggerate my own worth. I don't.

Lorenzo considers this, offering a ghost of a smile.

LORENZO

My mistress, Lucrezia, seems to think you have a singular talent for portraiture --

At this, Lorenzo reveals the SKETCH DaVinci did of Lucrezia.

LORENZO (CONT'D)

She was most insistent that you and none other be the one to capture her beauty.

DAVINCI

I'd say she has a discerning eye, then.

BECCHI

A warning, Sir. He has a reputation for *taking* commissions, but finishing *few*.

LORENZO
 (to DaVinci)
 Is this true?

DAVINCI
 I've been accused of many things.
 But on this count, I plead guilty.
 I wrestle with details. I bore
 easily. Call it a flaw.

LORENZO
 On *this* commission, you would be
 wise to overcome it.

DAVINCI
 (offering a polite bow)
 When it comes to Ms. Donati,
 boredom is the *last* thing I fear.

Lorenzo sits back, appraising DaVinci. Amused.

LORENZO
 I'll have your father draw up the
 contract, then.

Lorenzo turns away, dismissing DaVinci. But DaVinci lingers,
 setting one of his notebooks down in front of Lorenzo.

DAVINCI
 Sir? If I may, I have a few other
 designs you might be interested in --

BECCHI
 That will be all, DaVinci.

But DaVinci presses on, quickly flipping through the pages,
 settling on a diagram featuring a MULTI-BARRELED RIFLE.

DAVINCI
 This item, for instance, can greatly
 increase your gunners' rate of
 firepower. While the top rack is
 being fired, the rack below can be
 loaded, and the rack below that one
 allowed to cool. The cannons are
 also arranged in a fan-like spread
 in order to allow for a greater
 distribution of projectiles --

BECCHI
 DaVinci!

But Lorenzo holds up his hand. He flips through the next few
 pages, settling on a DIAGRAM OF A CONICAL TANK-LIKE WEAPON.

DAVINCI

This is an armored car for breaking an enemy's line. Propulsion is achieved by two men, who are housed within, operating cranks, which rotate the wheels. Cannons can be mounted around the car's perimeter.

Lorenzo continues, finding diagrams for an ARMORED BOAT, a SCYTHED CHARIOT, and finally, a FLYING MACHINE.

LORENZO

And this?

DAVINCI

A flying machine. Modelled after the articulated wings of a bat.

BECCHI

Madness. If man were meant to fly --

DAVINCI

-- he would have been born with wings. But a similar assertion could have been made prior to the invention of gunpowder. Or the wheel. Or any other invention conceived since fire.

(beat)

I believe man will fly. And I base this belief on the fact that God has blessed us with minds *capable* of imagining things. He wouldn't have granted us this gift if he didn't want us to use it. Anything than can be *dreamt* of will eventually be built. And anyone who says otherwise is a fool.

Lorenzo glances at Becchi, amazed by DaVinci's impertinence.

LORENZO

So what, exactly, do you propose?

DaVinci takes a breath, knowing his moment is at hand.

DAVINCI

I wish to be employed as a military engineer. Allow me to apply my talents in Florence's defense.

Becchi shakes his head, audibly scoffing at the idea.

LORENZO

I am a humanist, DaVinci. I have no interest in waging war.

DAVINCI

And yet, your humanism is precisely why war will happen. Thanks to your patronage, Florence is a crucible of innovation. But we both know the only reason that innovation exists is because its people actually have the *freedom* to challenge the old doctrines. Rome fears that freedom. Indeed, they fear the future itself.

Lorenzo mulls over DaVinci's words. Then:

LORENZO

I will give you a modest stipend. To see whether these contraptions of yours can actually be *realized*.

DAVINCI

Shall we say a hundred florins?

LORENZO

We shall say fifty. And if you haggle any further, I'll cut out your tongue.

BECCHI

(under his breath)
Which would please us all.

DaVinci smiles, pleased, and offers another bow.

DAVINCI

As you say, Sir. Thank-you.

As DaVinci gathers his notebooks, Lorenzo looks once more to the sketch of Lucrezia. He gestures to it --

LORENZO

You used Lucrezia to gain access to me, didn't you?

DAVINCI

I am an engineer. I utilize any device at my disposal in order to realize my goals.

Lorenzo drops the sketch of Lucrezia into the fire.

LORENZO

Clever, but I'd caution you not to get too clever around me. A clockwork loses its luster once one glimpses the gears beneath its face.

DAVINCI

Point taken.

But as DaVinci makes his exit, something catches his eye --

A FIGURINE ON LORENZO'S BOOKSHELVES

The lion-headed being entwined in serpents. DaVinci tries to fathom its implications and Lorenzo's role in all of this.

LORENZO

Is there a problem?

DAVINCI

(covering)

None at all. Good day, Sir.

DaVinci leaves. And we HOLD ON the sketch of Lucrezia, her beautiful features consumed by flame.

INT. VERROCCHIO'S WORKSHOP - GROUND FLOOR - DAY

As DaVinci enters, he finds Verrocchio, Nico, Zoroaster, and the rest of the assistants waiting for him. They APPLAUD.

VERROCCHIO

Congratulations, Leonardo.

DAVINCI

Word travels fast.

VERROCCHIO

There are no secrets in Florence.
How the devil did you do it?

ZOROASTER

He played on a woman's vanity.
(offering DaVinci wine)
Your stratagems become clear. You
are a bastard of the highest order.

At Verrocchio's urging, Nico pours wine for the others.

VERROCCHIO

Drink up, all of you. Then get
back to work.

(to DaVinci, pointedly)

(MORE)

VERROCCHIO (CONT'D)

We've got a *Columbina* to build.
And if it isn't the most
spectacular bird this city has ever
seen, our heads will roll.

DaVinci smiles, basking in his moment of victory even as he pulls Zoroaster aside and speaks to him quietly:

DAVINCI

I have a job for you. The Jew who
was hanged yesterday? I need you
to steal his body for me. I want
to examine it.

ZOROASTER

And my compensation?

DAVINCI

Depends on how fresh the corpse is.

ZOROASTER

Then I'd best get digging.

EXT. FLORENCE CATHEDRAL/PIAZZA DEL DUOMO - DAY

CHURCH BELLS ring. It's Easter and Florence is celebrating. Banners, flowers, and tapestries hang from the windows. Citizens mill about, dressed as clowns, nymphs, and devils.

A PROCESSION OF ARMORED HORSEMEN winds through the crowd. The centerpiece is a giant wooden cart hauled by a garland-strewn team of WHITE OXEN. Before the cart; a GROUP OF MEN bearing a LARGE CANDLE, the so called "Holy Fire".

LORENZO MEDICI

Stands on the cathedral steps, along with Giuliano, Gentile Becchi, the ARCHBISHOP, and the rest of the Medici clan.

ANGLE ON DAVINCI AND HIS FRIENDS

Zoroaster is dressed as BACCHUS, Verrocchio as a HERMIT, Nico as a JESTER. Vanessa as a NYMPH. DaVinci wears no costume.

As the procession nears the cathedral, Lorenzo raises his arms and a CHEER goes up from the crowd.

ZOROASTER

Look at the drunken bastards,
they're eating it up. Lorenzo's
nothing, if not a showman.

The Holy Fire is transferred to Lorenzo's retinue, who carry it into the Cathedral. Verrocchio looks to DaVinci, nervous.

VERROCCHIO
It won't be long now.

The group watches as the thirty foot-high cart is moved to the center of the square, then loaded with FIREWORKS.

NICO
What if the *Columbina* misses its mark, Maestro?

ZOROASTER
Then you can kiss your master's learned ass goodbye.

Another weighted look passes between DaVinci and Verrocchio. But then -- DaVinci catches the eye of a MASKED WOMAN dressed as a scarlet-veiled harlot.

ZOROASTER (CONT'D)
That doxy with the big tits has been making eyes at you for an hour.

DAVINCI
So?

ZOROASTER
So she wants your prick, you pompous malt-worm. And if you're not game to supply it, I will.

DaVinci smiles and throws an arm about Zoroaster's shoulder.

DAVINCI
If you dedicated a *tenth* of your sexual drive to other pursuits, you'd be the richest man in Europe, Zo.

ZOROASTER
Yes, but my prick would be that much poorer.

VERROCCHIO
Shhh. The *Columbina's* about to fly.

Silence settles upon the crowd as the cathedral are opened --

THEN, THE COLUMBINA

Emerges from the Cathedral doors. A six-foot wide confection of satin and gilt and feathers. Gracefully flapping its wings, trailing a COMET'S TAIL OF FIRE behind it.

The crowd is awe-struck as it flies over their heads, landing atop the fireworks-laden cart. The flames quickly spread, and in seconds, FIREWORKS fountain up over the piazza.

For Florence, it is a transformational moment. A demonstration that God has graced their Republic.

The crowd CHEERS. MUSICIANS burst out in song and the carnival begins. Verrocchio hugs DaVinci, relieved. Nico looks to Vanessa, boastful.

NICO

Did you see it? I glued the feathers on. Every one of them.

VANESSA

Well done, Nico!

She tousles his hair, but her eyes are on --

DAVINCI,

Who is LAUGHING, uncharacteristically losing himself in the moment. And then, once again, he catches sight of --

THE SCARLET WOMAN,

Intermittently visible through the crowd. She gestures to him. Time slows. And much to Vanessa's dismay, DaVinci follows her. For a moment, he loses sight of the woman --

-- then he FINDS her once more, entering an alleyway. DaVinci follows her, like a sailor stalking a siren.

INT. VERROCCHIO'S STUDIO - LIVING QUARTERS - DUSK

DaVinci and the scarlet woman are FUCKING by candlelight. The woman's robes are off, but she continues wearing her mask. SOUNDS from the carnival waft through the open window --

-- but the two are oblivious. The sex is raw and animalistic. Her chest heaves, sweat running down between her breasts. He reaches for one them, crushing it with his fingers. She GROANS, sinks her nails into his back, raking downward.

As they climax, she moves her hand between them, touching herself as he continues thrusting. Finally, their limbs constrict, then relax and DaVinci collapses beside her.

DAVINCI

Christ. That was astounding.

He reaches for a bottle of wine, refilling their cups. The woman lounges beside him, catching her breath.

DaVinci absently trails his fingers through her hair, then down over her breasts, her abdomen, her pubic mound.

SCARLET WOMAN

Does my cunt please you?

DAVINCI

Pleases, yes. And fascinates. And terrifies.

SCARLET WOMAN

Perhaps that's why they call it the "cave of wonders". We create life. Men just destroy it.

(beat)

But tell me, truly; are you this wistful with all the whores you bed?

DAVINCI

You are no whore, Signora.

The masked woman inclines her head; a silent question.

DAVINCI (CONT'D)

We needn't continue this pretense, Miss Donati. I knew it was you from the moment you approached me.

The woman removes her mask, revealing her face: Lucrezia.

LUCREZIA

How did you know?

DAVINCI

I sketched you. Your features, your form, your bearing -- all are now permanently etched in my memory. No fold of fabric could ever conceal your identity from me for long.

(beat)

The more salient question is; why would a noblewoman risk her reputation on a lowly artisan?

LUCREZIA

Isn't that the point of Carnival? To pretend, for a night, that we're something we're not?

DAVINCI

I think there's more to it than that.

LUCREZIA

Tell me, then.

DaVinci brings a candle closer to better illuminate her face.

DAVINCI

You were intrigued by my sketch. You felt that it captured an aspect of yourself that remains hidden from your husband, your lover, Lorenzo. The only time you see this aspect is on rare occasions when you happen to catch your reflection in a mirror and find a stranger staring back at you.

(beat)

You want to know who this stranger is. And you wanted to know the artist that was capable of capturing something so elusive.

From the look on Lucrezia's face, we can tell that DaVinci's characterization of her was devastatingly accurate.

LUCREZIA

You knew I'd seek you out, then.

DAVINCI

I try to discover what motivates people, then proceed accordingly.

LUCREZIA

You manipulate them.

DAVINCI

I prefer to think of it as gently redirecting their trajectories.

Lucrezia studies him, still taken by his piercing words. They kiss again. And when their lips finally part:

LUCREZIA

Lorenzo was quite taken with your designs, you know. May I see one of these marvels?

DaVinci considers, then reaches for his notebook, flipping to a page with a sketch of a PYRAMIDAL PARACHUTE DEVICE.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)

What is it?

DAVINCI

A device for slowing one's rate of descent.

LUCREZIA

Under what circumstances would I possibly have use for this?

DAVINCI

Say you were trapped in a fortress that had just been breached. You could strap yourself into this and safely float down to freedom.

Lucrezia assesses the sketch and DaVinci in a new light now.

LUCREZIA

It would appear that Lorenzo's interest in you was justified.

DaVinci rolls back on top of Lucrezia, ready for another go.

DAVINCI

And his lover's as well, I hope.

LUCREZIA

Perhaps. But I'm curious. I've risked my reputation sleeping with you; you've risked more. Possibly, even death.

DAVINCI

To what do you ascribe my reckless behavior, then?

Lucrezia ponders a moment, then simply says:

LUCREZIA

Love.

DAVINCI

Don't be absurd.

LUCREZIA

You saw me, you drew me, you fell in love. It's as simple as that. Add in the fact that I'm forbidden fruit, and your fate was sealed.

DAVINCI

You're the third person this week to lecture me on fate.

LUCREZIA
 Maybe it's time you started
 listening.

Lucrezia rolls on top of him, straddling him.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)
 Fuck me again, Leonardo. And while
 you're doing it, remember this --

She reaches down, guiding his cock inside her.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)
 -- you're not the only one capable
 of manipulation.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE VATICAN - SECRET PASSAGEWAY - NIGHT

Count Riario holds a lantern and leads a HOODED FIGURE
 through a narrow, cobwebbed passage. He whispers:

RIARIO
 This passage is known only to his
 Holiness' closest advisors. For
 obvious reasons, we can't have you
 parading through the front door.

They reach the end of the passage. Riario moves to knock on
 a panel, then pauses, looking to the hooded figure --

RIARIO (CONT'D)
 Oh. How rude of me. I promised
 you your payment first --

Riario reaches into his robes, producing a jewel box, which
 he hands to the figure. The figure opens it --

A SEVERED HUMAN FINGER

Rests within, wearing a ring set with a rare, cyan-colored
 gemstone known as SERENDIBITE. The hooded figure seems
 frozen by the sight, distressed.

RIARIO (CONT'D)
 (offering a baleful smile)
 I take it you're satisfied?

After a long beat, the hooded figure nods and closes the box.
 Riario KNOCKS ONCE on a panel, then TWICE MORE. The panel is
 opened and they are ushered by a SWISS MERCENARY into --

INT. VATICAN LIBRARY - SECRET ARCHIVES - NIGHT

-- a sepulchral maze of twisting library stacks. After a few turns, they come upon an island of light where --

POPE SIXTUS,

Now dressed in his Papal vestments, sits at a table with Francesco Pazzi and Lupo Mercuri. Riario bows.

RIARIO

Your Eminence. I bring news from Florence.

SIXTUS

Get on with it, then.

RIARIO

A new player has entered the stage. An artist known as Leonardo DaVinci. The Medicis have employed him to design siege weapons.

SIXTUS

Artists are as common as court jesters. I see no reason why this news should concern us.

At this point, the hooded figure speaks: a WOMAN.

HOODED FIGURE

This artist is *different*. His ideas are *unusual*, even heretical.

RIARIO

(gesturing to her)
Our agent in Florence.

The woman pulls back her hood, revealing herself to be Lucrezia Donati. Sixtus assesses her, glancing at Mercuri.

MERCURI

You trust your intelligence to a *woman*?

RIARIO

When one seeks to convey a message, I prefer to use vessels others would readily dismiss.

As the men consider Riario's wisdom, Lucrezia nods to Mercuri.

LUCREZIA

If I'm not mistaken, you are Lupo
Mercuri, Curator of the Secret
Archives?

MERCURI

I am. What of it?

LUCREZIA

You may be interested to know that
DaVinci made contact with the Turk.
Apparently, he's searching for
something called the Book of Leaves?

The news hits Sixtus and the others like a bomb.

SIXTUS

It would appear the Turk has found
a new champion. Continue watching
him. See if he can be coopted.

LUCREZIA

And if he can't?

Sixtus sits forward, his tone becoming dark and merciless.

SIXTUS

Then DaVinci will be consumed in
the fiery sorrows of Hell along
with the rest of God's enemies.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END