

IN GOLD AND LAPIS LAZULI

by

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In 1511, a German monk named Martin Luther traveled to Rome. He was twenty-seven, devout, and unknown. In the same city, in the same year, the painter Raphael—also twenty-seven, and already one of the most celebrated artists of his age—was at work in the Vatican on the frescoes that would help define the High Renaissance, including *The School of Athens*.

There is no record that the two men met. But they could have. This play imagines the afternoon they did, and the following day.

The principal characters were all real. Baldassare Castiglione, the diplomat, would soon write *The Book of the Courtier* and give the world the idea of *sprezzatura*—the art of making the difficult appear effortless. (A few years later, Raphael would paint Castiglione's famous portrait, which now hangs in the Louvre.) Francesco Argentino, though obscure today, was a Vatican official responsible for financing the Church's ambitions. The rest—the money, the wars, the pigments carried across the world, the monk's restless questions—is drawn from the period, though the conversation is invented.

Six years after this imagined afternoon, Luther would post his Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg—nailed to a church door, so the story goes. The questions that troubled him in Rome would soon become questions for all of Europe.

CHARACTERS

The play is written for a company of five actors. Baldassare Castiglione and Francesco Argentino are intended to be played by the same actor.

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| RAPHAEL | (27). The celebrated painter approaching the height of his fame. Charming, disciplined, and endlessly observant—at work he misses nothing. Beneath the easy manner is an obsessive craftsman who believes, without any doubt at all, that beauty can reveal truth. He has given himself so completely to his work that there is, increasingly, little of him left outside it. |
| MARTIN LUTHER | (27). An Augustinian monk from Germany, in Rome on his order's business. He arrives unassuming, even timid, and only gradually reveals the force beneath: intellectually fearless, relentlessly curious, unable to leave an idea unexamined even when the idea turns and wounds him. |
| BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE | (30s). Courtier, diplomat, and humanist. The man who will one day give the world the idea of <i>sprezzatura</i> , the art of making the difficult appear effortless. He embodies it completely. Elegant, socially fearless, the great conversationalist of the play, he delights in bringing remarkable people together and watching what happens. |
| FRANCESCO ARGENTINO | (40s). A recently promoted cardinal and the Vatican Datary, the man responsible for finding the money that makes the Renaissance possible. Calm, impeccably dressed, and possessed of perfect institutional authority. He never raises his voice, never hurries, and never appears surprised. He inhabits a world where every masterpiece has a cost, every commission a ledger, and every dream a price that must be paid. |
| BEATRICE | (Early 20s). A model in Raphael's workshop. Warm, perceptive, and practical. Not formally educated, but no less intelligent for it. She reads people instinctively and is accustomed to Raphael's demanding eye. |
| SANDRO | (20s). One of Raphael's many assistants. Efficient, loyal, and rarely surprised by anything that happens in the workshop. |

SETTING

Rome: 1511.

Scene I: Raphael's workshop.

Scene II: The Vatican. The Stanza della Segnatura, where *The School of Athens* is being painted. The following day.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The play assumes that *The School of Athens* occupies a wall of the Stanza della Segnatura. How that wall is realized—whether through a full reproduction, an abstract suggestion, projections, scaffolding alone, or not represented visually at all—is left entirely to the production. It may be staged on the upstage wall, the fourth wall, or in any other way that serves the production, each resulting in a different relationship between the actors, the fresco, and the audience.

Language:

The characters speak Latin and Italian to each other as the situation demands. The play is performed in English, which stands in for both languages, but the language barriers between the characters are real and should remain legible to the audience.

The context should make clear who can understand whom, and who is being spoken past. However, for the reader's convenience, an asterisk (*) beside a character's name means the speech that follows is spoken in Latin. Otherwise, it is spoken in Italian. Luther speaks almost entirely in Latin; Beatrice and Sandro speak only Italian. Raphael, Castiglione, and Argentino are bilingual.

SCENE I

The workshop of Raphael. Late afternoon light. The floor and every surface bear the residue of production: jars of pigment, stretched panels, brushes standing in jars. Along one wall, finished and half-finished works lean face-out. Apart from them, alone, an easel stands draped in cloth, its picture hidden.

RAPHAEL sits with his back to the audience, drawing at an easel. He does not look up. Near him, his assistant SANDRO grinds pigment, unhurried, practiced. The room is quiet with work.

CASTIGLIONE strides in.

CASTIGLIONE

Is the consumption of beer unbecoming of a gentleman?

Raphael doesn't turn and continues drawing.

RAPHAEL

I suspect you have already decided.

CASTIGLIONE

Not at all. I was walking down the Via Papale when I was accosted by a group of monks—

RAPHAEL

Accosted?

CASTIGLIONE

Well, no. I introduced myself.

RAPHAEL

You accosted them.

CASTIGLIONE

Of course. I found them shouting, nearly at each other's throats, and it seemed discourteous not to inquire why.

RAPHAEL

Monks?

CASTIGLIONE

German monks.

RAPHAEL

Ah.

CASTIGLIONE

They were disputing the meaning of a sentence in Saint Augustine's writings. I offered to arbitrate.

RAPHAEL

They accepted your qualifications?

CASTIGLIONE

They had reached the point where everyone preferred speaking to listening, and I offered a graceful exit. In my presence, they were obliged to continue in Latin. It is astonishing how much civility one language can impose upon another.

RAPHAEL

Where does the beer come in?

CASTIGLIONE

Hold on. They had been arguing for half an hour, with some insisting Augustine couldn't possibly have intended what he appeared to say, when the youngest among them stood, raised his voice, and said, "Perhaps Augustine chose those words because he meant them."

RAPHAEL

That ended the argument?

CASTIGLIONE

Quite the opposite. But it wasn't what this monk said, it was his certainty that impressed me. He spoke as though he had already settled the matter with himself and God and he cared for nothing else.

RAPHAEL

Then he'll do well in Rome.

CASTIGLIONE

Oh, very well. But I don't think he'd enjoy being pope. If everyone were obliged to listen to him, he'd find it unsporting.

(beat)

I asked him where such conviction came from. He said God had struck him with a bolt of lightning.

Raphael finally stops drawing. He turns to Castiglione and the audience.

RAPHAEL

Is that a metaphor?

CASTIGLIONE

No.

RAPHAEL

It actually struck him?

CASTIGLIONE

Yes.

RAPHAEL

He survived?

CASTIGLIONE

Evidently.

A pause.

RAPHAEL

What's he look like?

CASTIGLIONE

Like any other German who enjoys beer. No scorch marks, if that's what you mean. But you will see for yourself. I invited him for a glass.

RAPHAEL

You invited him *here*?

CASTIGLIONE

Quite.

RAPHAEL

Baldassare, I am drowning in work—

CASTIGLIONE

How many assistants do you have?

RAPHAEL

More than Augustine.

CASTIGLIONE

Sandro, how many assistants does he have?

SANDRO

(Immediately)

Fifty.

RAPHAEL

Which is fewer than the Pope thinks. And fewer than I require to complete my commission on time.

CASTIGLIONE

You will not turn this man away, Raph.

RAPHAEL

(Begins drawing again.)

I must.

CASTIGLIONE

While you spend your days studying faces, I spend mine studying people. You should indulge my curiosity now and then. It keeps the eye honest.

A KNOCK at the door. Sandro walks over to open it. The door creaks.

LUTHER walks in—slightly timid.

LUTHER

Buongiorno.

CASTIGLIONE*

Buongiorno, Brother Martin! We shall spare you Italian. And we must spare Raphael Greek...and me—German. Which leaves us Latin.

LUTHER*

Gratias, Signore.

Raphael keeps drawing. Luther and Castiglione look over. A short silence.

CASTIGLIONE*

Raphael, your reputation has survived your poor manners remarkably well.

LUTHER*

Forgive me. Workshops are rarely improved by monks.

CASTIGLIONE*

Give him a moment.

He gestures and calls over Sandro.

CASTIGLIONE

Sandro, you must find us some beer. For your master's sake.

(He takes out a coin and hands it to Sandro.)

SANDRO

At once, Count Castiglione.

(He exits.)

RAPHAEL*

The Pope will be pleased to learn how he is paying for my workshop's time.

LUTHER*

The Pope?

CASTIGLIONE*

Yes. Julius has given Raphael four walls and asked him to fill them with everything worth knowing.

LUTHER*

And what has Raphael chosen?

CASTIGLIONE*

Tell him.

(Silence.)

Raphael.

Raphael stops drawing. He stands and crosses toward them.

RAPHAEL*

Not what is worth knowing. What is worth seeing. Theology. Philosophy. Poetry. Civil law.

(Luther smiles.)

You're smiling.

LUTHER*

I have always thought of them as things to be learned, not seen.

RAPHAEL*

I am a painter and you are a monk.

LUTHER*

Then we are colleagues of a sort.

RAPHAEL*

Hardly.

LUTHER*

Why?

RAPHAEL*

Because I work with the eye.

LUTHER*

No. You make arguments. The same as I.

RAPHAEL*

Arguments?

LUTHER*

Certainly. About the love and mercy of Christ. Yours are made with line and color.

A short silence.

CASTIGLIONE*

Well. There we are.

RAPHAEL*

We passed over introductions.

CASTIGLIONE*

Let me correct the error. Brother Martin Luther of the Augustinians. Please meet Maestro Raphael of Urbino.

They shake hands.

LUTHER*

I've heard much of your work.

RAPHAEL*

My work prefers being seen. You must visit the Stanza soon. What brings you to Rome?

LUTHER*

Obedience. My order sent me.

RAPHAEL*

Surely curiosity about the city brought you as well?

LUTHER*

Yes. But curiosity was not requested.

CASTIGLIONE*

Brother Luther was chosen to represent a delegation—

RAPHAEL*

About what?

LUTHER*

The rules by which the Augustinians are to live. I fear the details would bore you to tears.

RAPHAEL*

That is likely. How old are you, Brother Martin?

LUTHER*

Twenty-seven.

RAPHAEL*

I am twenty-seven. When is your birthday?

LUTHER*

November 10.

RAPHAEL*

April 6.

CASTIGLIONE*

Good. We've established seniority.

A knock on the door.

CASTIGLIONE*

I pray that is the beer.

Castiglione opens the door.
In walks Beatrice.

CASTIGLIONE

Beatrice! Ciao, bellissima!

BEATRICE

Ciao, amico mio! Ciao, maestro!

CASTIGLIONE*

Ah, we have abandoned Brother Martin.

RAPHAEL*

This is Beatrice. She sits for me.

LUTHER

Buongiorno.

BEATRICE

Buongiorno. Scusa. My Latin is very poor.

RAPHAEL*

I must do some sketches for my commission. Stay, if you like, Brother Martin.

LUTHER*

Thank you.

Beatrice moves over to sit on a stool.
Raphael pivots an easel with an
unfinished drawing to face her.

RAPHAEL*

Beatrice is our Madonna.

Luther stares at her.

LUTHER*

The holy virgin.

Castiglione and Raphael laugh.

CASTIGLIONE*

Only until Raphael is finished.

BEATRICE

What did he say?

RAPHAEL

He thinks very highly of your profession.

Raphael starts lining up his pencil on the drawing, looking at Beatrice.

RAPHAEL

Sandro, will you get the baby?

CASTIGLIONE

Sandro is questing for our beer.

RAPHAEL

Beatrice, can you?

Beatrice stands and moves over to a cabinet. She removes a bundle of carefully wrapped cloth.

CASTIGLIONE* (to Luther)

Have you seen the Forum?

LUTHER*

Not yet. I have seen the churches.

CASTIGLIONE*

Then you've seen some of the Forum already. Much of its stone found a second life there...

Beatrice returns to the stool and instinctively cradles the cloth bundle.

CASTIGLIONE*

Though none of it is enough for Pope Julius. He is forever chasing another city. Today Bologna. Tomorrow somewhere else. And in between, he is rebuilding St. Peter's.

LUTHER*

I passed by. It seemed the Earth itself was under construction. I thought if we dig much farther, we shall meet the devil before we reach Saint Peter.

CASTIGLIONE*

You've understood Rome rather quickly.

RAPHAEL

Chin down and left.

(Beat)

More.

(Beat)

Less.

(He studies for several seconds. He makes a few quick marks.)

Perfetta.

He keeps drawing.

Luther comes over to watch.

Raphael sketches in silence.

RAPHAEL*

What do you see?

Luther looks down at the paper.

RAPHAEL*

No. Look at her.

Luther studies Beatrice.

LUTHER*

A woman holding a bundle of cloth.

RAPHAEL*

What else?

LUTHER*

Her mouth is closed. She gazes.

RAPHAEL*

Where?

LUTHER*

Down at the cloth.

RAPHAEL*

What else?

LUTHER*

I don't know.

What do her eyes say?
RAPHAEL*
She is proud. No—
LUTHER*
(Beat)
She is afraid to be proud.
RAPHAEL*
More.
LUTHER*
She knows who she is holding.
RAPHAEL*
You see a child.
LUTHER*
Yes. But she sees more than a child.
(A beat.)
RAPHAEL*
Keep going.
LUTHER*
She sees his whole life. ... She knows how it will end. ... She is already grieving him. ... She is gazing at the Cross.
Raphael stops drawing. He lowers his pencil.
BEATRICE
Am I okay?
RAPHAEL
My dear...you are perfect.
BEATRICE
Can I move?
RAPHAEL
Yes.
Beatrice stretches, rubs her shoulder, lets the cloth sag under one arm.

RAPHAEL* (to Luther)

What do you see now?

LUTHER*

Beatrice.

Raphael smiles. The door flies open and Sandro enters, carrying a keg.

SANDRO

I wasn't sure how much you wanted.

CASTIGLIONE

Grazie, Sandro! Rome rewards men who think in barrels!

(Beat)

Mugs, if you please.

Sandro puts down the keg and opens a cabinet. He pulls out mugs.

CASTIGLIONE

Maestro, can we part you from your work for an interlude?

Beatrice is already standing and crossing the room.

RAPHAEL

Yes, I seem to have lost my Madonna.

Sandro takes out five mugs and starts pouring from the keg's tap. Beatrice leans over a filled mug, smells it, then recoils.

BEATRICE

Orrendo! It smells like bad bread.

CASTIGLIONE

You've never had it?

BEATRICE

Why would I?

CASTIGLIONE*

Brother Martin, she truly is a virgin now.

LUTHER*

Truly?

CASTIGLIONE*

In matters of beer.

LUTHER*

This...is an opportunity. Will you translate for me?

CASTIGLIONE*

Certainly.

LUTHER*

Tell her that beer belongs to ordinary people.

(Simultaneously, Castiglione quietly translates to Beatrice.)

It belongs to farmers, mothers, and monks. It belongs to carpenters. It asks for nothing from a man except that he be thirsty.

BEATRICE

But carpenters also drink wine.

(Castiglione quietly translates back.)

LUTHER*

True. But every country grows accustomed to the gifts of the land. In Germany, God gave us barley.

BEATRICE

Then God was kinder to Italy.

Castiglione translates. Luther laughs.

LUTHER*

He gives Germany more practice in gratitude.

CASTIGLIONE*

A toast?

(Beat)

Maestro?

RAPHAEL*

Yes.

(All five raise their glasses.)

To seeing well. *A vedere bene.*

LUTHER*

To seeing well.

BEATRICE

A vedere bene.

They clink and drink. Beatrice wrinkles her nose.

CASTIGLIONE

What do you think?

BEATRICE

It is not the blood of Christ.

CASTIGLIONE

A difficult standard for a brewer.

RAPHAEL* (to Castiglione)

You still owe a verdict. Is the consumption of beer unbecoming of a gentleman?

CASTIGLIONE*

Not if he drinks it for the sake of hospitality.

Castiglione, Raphael, and Luther raise their glasses again and drink.

LUTHER*

You have been gracious hosts. I thank you.

RAPHAEL*

There is one thing Baldassare told me that refuses to leave my mind.

LUTHER*

Yes?

RAPHAEL*

He said you were struck by lightning.

Luther sits. Castiglione and Raphael pull over nearby chairs. Beatrice and Sandro, who don't speak Latin, move away, back toward the stool she was posing on.

LUTHER*

Yes. I was twenty-one. I was near Stotternheim, returning home from university, and the sky darkened. I remember thinking that I ought to hurry home...and then—

(Beat)

The whole world became light. I was on my knees, and I heard myself talking...babbling...and I cried out, "God, help me! I will become a monk!"

RAPHAEL*

Did you mean it?

LUTHER*

I have never meant anything more.

RAPHAEL*

But did you feel that God had frightened you into your faith? That you promised out of fear?

LUTHER*

Of course I was afraid. But fear cannot invent a promise. It can only uncover one.

CASTIGLIONE*

Did it hurt?

LUTHER*

Later. But in the moment there was nothing but light.

(Beat)

Maestro, may I ask you something?

RAPHAEL*

Please.

LUTHER*

What is the Pope like?

A small silence.

CASTIGLIONE*

That is a dangerous question.

LUTHER*

Forgive me.

CASTIGLIONE*

No forgiveness required. It is merely a question that can betray more about the answerer than he intends.

(He looks to Raphael.)

The Maestro is worth hearing.

A pause as Raphael thinks of what to say. He puts down his mug. He stands.

RAPHAEL*

Do you see these easels?

LUTHER*

Yes.

RAPHAEL*

These paints? These brushes, these knives?

LUTHER*

Yes.

RAPHAEL*

Everything in this room was paid for by Julius. Nothing in Rome moves without him. Together we bring the Gospel to those who cannot read it.

CASTIGLIONE*

Raph. You haven't answered the question.

RAPHAEL*

What?

CASTIGLIONE*

He asked what Julius was *like*.

RAPHAEL*

Baldo, are you a diplomat or its inverse?

CASTIGLIONE*

Today I am the audience.

(He opens his palms toward Raphael and Luther.)

RAPHAEL*

Julius is...impatient. He comes to the scaffold before the plaster is dry. He thinks history is a schedule that has fallen behind. He wants to see Heaven finished by Tuesday.

(Beat)

He asks impossible things. But—somehow, some of them happen. Because he believes it, the rest of us believe it too.

(Beat)

I could tell you what he does but I do not know if I could tell you what he is like.
When he comes into a room, everyone thinks only of what they need from him.

(Beat)

For me, that is the next commission. The next payment.

LUTHER*

Maestro, it is curious. You showed me how to look into the face of Beatrice and see the Virgin. Yet you have looked upon Julius a hundred times, and you tell me you have not seen him.

RAPHAEL*

Why do you care about Julius?

LUTHER*

Why does a monk care about the Pope?

RAPHAEL*

No, the man. He is only a man.

Luther stands.

LUTHER*

That is precisely why I care.

A silence.

LUTHER*

When I was struck, there was no one between me and the sky. There was no pope. No painting. No one to explain it to me afterwards. But God had rattled through my skull.

(He looks at the covered panels, the easel, the room.)

I have watched you take a girl and make her holy. I have watched you take a pope and make him no more than a patron. You are moving the sacred around the room like a man arranging furniture. And that frightens me.

RAPHAEL*

Frightens you?

LUTHER*

Because a farmer in Saxony will spend his whole life plowing, that he may make a pilgrimage to Rome. And when he arrives, he will kneel before what you arrange for him. He will never read the Confessions. He will never be struck as I was struck. He will only know God as far as men like you...men better than me,

men with more skill than God gave me allow him to. I do not fear poor painters. I fear great ones.

RAPHAEL*

Then tell me this. Saint Augustine.

LUTHER* (confused)

Augustine?

RAPHAEL*

Does he not stand between your Saxon farmer and God? Why is he not the same?

LUTHER*

(His tone elevates.)

You compare yourself to Augustine?

Across the room, Beatrice and Sandro
look over and stop talking.

RAPHAEL*

I compare nothing. I ask you the question.

Luther opens his mouth. Stops. He is not
used to being the one without an answer.

LUTHER*

Because...Augustine points away from himself.

RAPHAEL*

Does he?

LUTHER*

He says—"Do not look at me. I am a man, I am nothing. Look at what I am pointing to."

RAPHAEL*

Does not my Madonna?

LUTHER*

Augustine spends every sentence trying to disappear. He shows us where to look. Your Madonna becomes what I am looking at.

RAPHAEL*

But what is the effect? Your farmer kneels before my Madonna. He leaves loving Christ more than when he entered.

LUTHER*

That is Christ according to Raphael.

RAPHAEL*

When you read Augustine, whose Christ do you see?

A pause.

LUTHER*

I see Martin Luther's.

(A long pause. Luther stares into the middle distance.)

Which means I have never met Augustine's Christ. Only the Christ I found in Augustine.

He is quiet a moment. Raphael, watching him, rises and moves toward the covered panel in the middle of the room.

LUTHER*

And you found yours. And Julius his. And the farmer will find his own. Is each of us alone with the thing he has carved?

Raphael pulls the cloth off the panel—revealing a nearly-complete painting of the Annunciation: the Virgin Mary conversing with the angel Gabriel. Luther keeps staring forward into the audience, not yet seeing the painting.

LUTHER*

I went to the university to become a lawyer. I came out a monk. I know that part of that was God. But part of that was Martin Luther.

(Beat)

God forgive me. I want to be wrong. I want to meet a Christ who is not mine.

(Luther feels the silence behind him. He turns. He sees the painting. A long moment. He does not speak. Then—)

There you are.

A silence.
Blackout.

SCENE II

The Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican. One wall is the *School of Athens* in various stages of completion. Scaffolding climbs toward the vaulted ceiling.

The room is already alive with work. Sandro stands on a low platform, directing unseen assistants above him. A ladder sits at one side of the stage.

Raphael stands on the floor, not painting. He studies the wall above him, a portfolio of drawings tucked under one arm and a piece of charcoal in his hand. Beatrice sits in a chair nearby, sewing a torn length of cloth used to protect finished sections of fresco.

SANDRO

More water in the plaster!

A muffled reply from somewhere above.

SANDRO

Then carry it faster!

RAPHAEL

Plato is encroaching.

SANDRO

What, Maestro?

RAPHAEL

(He looks at his drawings and compares them to the fresco.)

Plato! His elbow is invading Aristotle!

From the wings, unhurried,
ARGENTINO, the Vatican Datary,
enters—a churchman in the immaculate
scarlet robes and red biretta of a
cardinal, a leather folio under his arm.
He has the ease of a man who is always

the most patient person in any room,
because he holds the money. He stops.
He looks at the wall for a moment before
he looks at Raphael, then approaches.

RAPHAEL

Cardinal Argentino. Which is it today—a commission or a reprimand?

ARGENTINO

Is that all you think of me, Maestro?

RAPHAEL

You have never once come to this room to admire it.

ARGENTINO

That is not true. I admire it constantly. I admire it the way I admire the sea—from
a safe distance, and with a full accounting of how many men have drowned.

RAPHAEL

And for your admiration, the Pope has made you cardinal.

ARGENTINO

For arithmetic, Maestro. Admiration he can get from anyone. A man who can find
the money is rarer than a man who can spend it.

RAPHAEL

You've come about the deadline.

ARGENTINO

No. I've come about Bologna.

(Raphael doesn't understand yet.)

We lost it. The French walked back in and we walked back out, and the difference
between those two walks was paid in gold that no longer exists.

(Still pleasant.)

The Pope is raising more. He is always raising more. And a man who is raising
money always develops a sudden and passionate interest in where his money has
gone.

(Argentino opens the folio. He reads.)

Pigment from Afghanistan bluer than the Virgin deserves. Scaffolding that could
roof a village in Romagna. I do not question the beauty, Maestro—I question the
accounting. The Holy Father wants the Segnatura finished by the feast. Not nearly
finished. Finished.

RAPHAEL

That is three weeks away.

ARGENTINO

Then you have three weeks.

(He looks over at Beatrice, who watches him.)

And no additional men. Or women. He is paying soldiers now.

(Argentino begins walking to the wing. When he is nearly offstage—)

RAPHAEL

Does he enjoy war?

ARGENTINO (turning back)

I have learned not to ask what His Holiness enjoys. I ask only what he intends.

Argentino exits.

BEATRICE

You must eat something.

RAPHAEL

Pigment?

BEATRICE

Soon you will not be well enough to joke.

RAPHAEL

I am very tired.

She gets up and goes to him. They turn toward the fresco.

BEATRICE

It's magnificent, Raph.

RAPHAEL

Made better by you. There you are.

(He points to a woman in the fresco.)

BEATRICE

You know it was nice to be someone other than Mary.

RAPHAEL

Yes?

BEATRICE

A little less holy.

RAPHAEL (smiles)

I should have made you Aristotle.

(Beatrice points to the sky like the pose in the fresco.)

That's Plato.

(Beatrice pivots her arm and points down. She holds the pose. They both laugh.)

SANDRO (shouting)

Maestro!

RAPHAEL

What?

SANDRO

The intonaco is drying near Euclid!

RAPHAEL

Then what are you waiting for? Finish Euclid!

SANDRO

Everyone to Euclid!

We hear the movement of assistants.

BEATRICE

After this you should go to the country.

RAPHAEL

And do what?

BEATRICE

Nothing. That's the point. Eat. Walk. Drink wine.

RAPHAEL

Hide from the cardinal.

BEATRICE

You'd miss him.

RAPHAEL

Never.

BEATRICE

You'd bring him with you. You'd spend the whole week arguing with him in here.

She touches Raphael's temple.

Then from the wing, Argentino enters.

RAPHAEL (to Beatrice)

You've somehow summoned him back.

ARGENTINO

His Holiness is pleased with the recent progress.

RAPHAEL (smiling)

Truly?

ARGENTINO

Yes. Accordingly, he has decided not to let you leave. After this, you will paint his private apartments.

RAPHAEL

I thought we were paying soldiers now.

ARGENTINO

What did I tell you? His Holiness is always raising money.

(He starts walking off.)

We will discuss your fees.

Argentino exits. A silence.

BEATRICE

The country will wait for you.

Luther enters from the opposite wing.

He says nothing. He walks slowly
through the room, looking up at the
unfinished frescoes.

RAPHAEL*

Brother Martin, you made it.

LUTHER*

Getting in proved more difficult than getting to Rome. The guards took me for another German pilgrim come to gape at the Vatican. Which, in fairness, I am. I eventually convinced them the Maestro asked me here. They asked if I had an appointment. I said I had an invitation. They preferred the appointment.

RAPHAEL*

And now you are here. What do you think?

Silence. Luther looks up at the wall.

LUTHER*

Where is Christ?

RAPHAEL*

On another wall.

LUTHER*

Why not here?

RAPHAEL*

This wall belongs to philosophy.

LUTHER*

Philosophy.

Beatrice walks back to the chair where she was sewing the protective cloth, and resumes sewing.

RAPHAEL*

The search for truth before Christ was known.

LUTHER*

You put Aristotle in the center.

RAPHAEL*

Indeed.

LUTHER*

Why?

RAPHAEL*

What do you mean? The eye demands that every composition have a center. Aristotle—

LUTHER*

You have taken him out of the library and put him on the wall. You crowned him.

RAPHAEL*

(He doesn't follow.)

He is a philosopher. He belongs with the philosophers. Where else would I put him?

LUTHER*

You don't know.

RAPHAEL*

What?

LUTHER*

What he did. Why he should not be at the center of anything in this building.

RAPHAEL*

You have lost me.

Luther crosses to the ladder and begins to climb as he speaks.

LUTHER*

Aristotle teaches that a man becomes righteous by doing righteous things. That you climb to God by your own effort, rung by rung, until you have earned Him.

BEATRICE

He is going to hurt himself.

RAPHAEL

Let him finish.

Luther stops several rungs above the stage.

LUTHER*

But if that is true, what becomes of grace? Christ has done the work. Why is anything left for us to earn? The more I know of Aristotle, the less I think he belongs beside our Lord.

RAPHAEL*

I confess I have not read the philosophers as closely as you. I have read them well enough to paint them. But you must admit it is you—not Aristotle—who is out of step with Rome.

LUTHER*

Yes. I am out of step with Rome. But it was Rome that taught me the step.

(He climbs one rung higher.)

I only took the next one after she stopped.

Argentino enters and takes in the sight of
Luther on the ladder.

ARGENTINO

Maestro, you have put the clergy to work? Even I had not thought to save money this way!

Luther comes down quickly.

RAPHAEL

Brother Martin was demonstrating a point. May we continue in Latin?

Luther, back on the ground, approaches
Argentino.

ARGENTINO*

Yes. Salve, Frater. I had heard there was a wandering German asking difficult questions throughout the city.

(He smiles politely.)

I am relieved to discover where we have misplaced him.

Luther bows slightly.

LUTHER*

I am honored, Your Eminence. I am Martin Luther, an Augustinian from Wittenberg.

ARGENTINO*

Wittenberg. That is a long way from Rome.

LUTHER*

It is. I came on foot, through the hospitality of my brothers on the road.

RAPHAEL*

He was debating the placement of Aristotle.

ARGENTINO*

Indeed?

LUTHER*

Yes, Your Eminence—

ARGENTINO*

The composition of the fresco is outside my jurisdiction. It belongs to the Maestro. I concern myself with...duller matters.

LUTHER*

Not the composition, Your Eminence—the man. Aristotle teaches that we earn our way to God by our own works. Will a Prince of the Church tell me whether that is right?

ARGENTINO* (smiles)

Fortunately, philosophy is also outside my jurisdiction.

LUTHER*

Your Eminence, this is theology.

Silence. Argentino looks up at the unfinished walls.

ARGENTINO*

You are quite right, Brother Monk. It is theology.

(Beat.)

But now you are no longer talking about the painting, which is Raphael's, and you are no longer talking about the building, which falls under my care.

(Beat.)

You are talking about souls. They belong to God, and I do not intercede.

LUTHER*

But we must intercede, Your Eminence. Is that not the purpose of a shepherd? To stand between our people and God, and teach them where to place their faith?

Argentino looks annoyed for the first time—losing his airiness. But he does not lose his patience.

ARGENTINO*

You ask the purpose of a shepherd. You are speaking like a young man from Wittenberg who has a small flock and knows all their names and professions. Rome does not have a flock, Brother Monk. Rome has Christendom. You cannot lead Christendom nearer to God one soul at a time. Here we must answer for kingdoms and peoples.

LUTHER*

But, Your Eminence, where does faith enter?

ARGENTINO*

Careful, Brother Monk. You stand in the halls of the Vicar of Christ. Do not mistake administration for unbelief.

(He walks away.)

I have appointments.

Argentino exits.

LUTHER*

Are there no theologians in the Vatican?

RAPHAEL*

You thought Rome would be different.

LUTHER*

Yes. I find myself surrounded by artists and accountants.

RAPHAEL*

You just argued theology with a cardinal.

LUTHER*

He did not argue theology with me, Maestro. He warned me away from it. Compared to him, I am—

RAPHAEL*

Augustine?

LUTHER*

(A small breath—almost a laugh.)

Augustine never faced such men.

Raphael's eye drifts back to the wall.
Something catches it.

RAPHAEL*

Forgive me—Italian.

(Raphael walks toward the wall and
shouts to Sandro in Italian.)

Sandro! How is Euclid?

SANDRO

Almost done. But we're low on lapis. I've been stretching it.

RAPHAEL

How low?

SANDRO

Enough blue for Aristotle's robe. Not enough for the sky.

BEATRICE

So make it a cloudy day.

RAPHAEL

You are dangerous, Beatrice.

(To Sandro)

Do we have azurite?

SANDRO

Yes.

RAPHAEL

(Shakes his head)

Never mind, it will not do. When you're done with Euclid, you will take three
men and scour all of Rome for lapis.

SANDRO

Yes, Maestro.

BEATRICE

And do not tell the Cardinal!

RAPHAEL

Yes, you heard her. Scour discreetly!

BEATRICE

You could have been a general.

RAPHAEL

Then I would have had much uglier company than you.

BEATRICE

And right now you'd be retreating from Bologna.

Raphael laughs.

LUTHER*

What did she say?

RAPHAEL*

She said that in the end, all men serve Julius.

Luther gives a faint smile, aware that
something has been lost in translation.

LUTHER*

Maestro, how much are you paid?

RAPHAEL*

That...is an unusual question in Rome. Do men speak of such things in Germany?

LUTHER*

Not often. But Rome has made me curious. Forgive me.

RAPHAEL*

You really wish to know?

LUTHER*

I do.

RAPHAEL*

Why?

LUTHER*

Because I think I am finally beginning to understand this room.

A pause.

RAPHAEL*

Two thousand ducats.

LUTHER*

Two thousand ducats! You could buy most of Wittenberg.

RAPHAEL*

That seems profane to you.

LUTHER*

Yes. The tithes, the indulgences—

RAPHAEL*

Add up the ledger. Count the wages of my workshop. Count the pigments. Then ask what it costs to buy a man's life, one commission at a time.

LUTHER*

I am sure the sums align, Maestro. That is Rome's genius. Rome can make anything seem necessary.

RAPHAEL*

Necessary? Even I would not call this room necessary. I would call it...good.

LUTHER*

It is easy for a man with two thousand ducats to call it good.

(A long beat.)

When you unveiled the Annunciation in your workshop, I felt as though the room had fallen silent to hear Gabriel speak.

(He gestures to the fresco.)

Now I see what this requires of the world, and I cannot believe Christ ever asked so much of us.

RAPHAEL*

What would you do, Martin? Would you give the plowman a bare wall? Would you give him an empty room and a book he cannot read, and call it holiness?

(For the first time, there is heat in him.)

I give him Christ in gold and lapis lazuli. I give him a ceiling that makes him forget, for one hour, that his back is aching and tomorrow's work is waiting for him. I give him a glimpse of heaven before he reaches it.

(Beat.)

You call that profane. I call it the church's mercy.

(Beat.)

Who loves him more, Martin? The one who gives him heaven or the one who would deny it to him?

Beatrice strides over, scowling. Luther is about to respond, but she cuts him off.

BEATRICE (to Luther)

Per Dio! You are upsetting a tired man.

She takes Raphael's arm and tries to
draw him away.

LUTHER*

(Flustered, he looks to Raphael.)

What?

RAPHAEL*

She says you're upsetting a tired man.

BEATRICE

(She steps toward Luther.)

He forgets to eat, he forgets the hour. He forgets there is a world beyond his
workshop and this room!

RAPHAEL

Beatrice—

BEATRICE (to Luther)

You come here and trouble him. You try to make him answer for your doubts. For
what?

(She points at the wall.)

Look at what he gives us!

LUTHER

(He puts his hand on his heart and
speaks to Beatrice, with the little
Italian he knows.)

Mi scuso.

Luther turns to Raphael.

LUTHER*

I do not know what she said, but I know I caused it.

Beatrice nods to Luther. Raphael sits
down on the floor. He looks at the wall.
Silence.

RAPHAEL*

I never had your bolt of lightning, Martin.

(Beat.)

I've only ever had the work.

LUTHER* (looking at the wall)

It is beautiful. God help me, it is beautiful.

Silence. Then Argentino enters at the wing and calls.

ARGENTINO

Raphael. His Holiness has asked for you.

Raphael stands up.

RAPHAEL*

A man must heed the call of his master.

LUTHER*

Goodbye, Maestro. Go with peace.

RAPHAEL*

The next time I pick up the brush, I will think of your farmer.

He walks toward Argentino. Then—he stops and turns toward Luther.

RAPHAEL*

Brother Martin—do not leave Rome until you have seen it finished.

Raphael and Argentino exit. Silence.
Luther contemplates the wall.

SANDRO

Beatrice, we're ready for the cover.

BEATRICE

Coming.

She gathers the long cloth she was mending. They attach it to ropes. She and Sandro begin to raise it over the finished section of the fresco—an ordinary end-of-day task, done a hundred times. They work without ceremony.

SANDRO

Mind the left. It's wet near Euclid.

I have it.

BEATRICE

The cloth rises—covering sections of the fresco. Sandro and Beatrice smooth it out. They finish.

Until tomorrow.

SANDRO

Beatrice and Sandro start walking toward the wings. Luther steps out of their way.

Buonanotte, Fratello.

BEATRICE

Buonanotte.

LUTHER

Luther nods at her and Sandro. Sandro and Beatrice exit.

Luther is alone with the covered wall. A long moment. At last, he turns to leave. He reaches the doorway. He stops, and looks back once more.

Blackout.

AUTHOR'S AFTERWORD

Raphael died on Good Friday, 1520. He was thirty-seven. Four cardinals carried his body, and Pope Julius's successor, Leo X, is said to have kissed his hand. The Latin inscription on his tomb can be translated: "Here lies that famous Raphael by whom Nature feared to be conquered while he lived, and when he was dying, feared herself to die."

The same Leo X excommunicated Martin Luther in January 1521; later that year, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V declared Luther an outlaw. Shielded by sympathetic protectors, Luther lived another twenty-five years: preaching, writing, and translating the Bible into German—so that a farmer in Saxony might be able to read it for himself.

History did arrange one meeting between the two men, and gave Luther the last word. In 1527, a mutinous army of Charles V sacked Rome. Many of the soldiers were Germans who had embraced Luther's ideas. As they looted the Vatican, one of them scratched a single word into the base of the *Disputa*, Raphael's fresco of theology facing *The School of Athens*. Six letters, in gothic script: LUTHER.