

INTRODUCTION

## NARRATOR

Our story so far: Santangelo is an apprentice to Cosimo, the esteemed Master of Faces in the studio of Niccolo di Montagna Rossa, a prominent artist. A talented artist in his own right, he has led a carefree life, notable only for series of brief and passionate romances. His affection for Isabetta, the new governess, will soon change everything ...

ACT ISCENE FOUR

The courtyard. ISABETTA and FILIPPA share a bench while the governess braids the child's hair.

FILIPPA

So, do you like him?

ISABETTA

Who?

FILIPPA

Santangelo, of course, don't be stupid!

ISABETTA

Yes, I think I do.

FILIPPA

But he's just one of papa's *boys*, an *apprentice*. He sleeps in the attic with the squirrels and pigeons!

ISABETTA

Luca and Iacopo sleep there, too.

FILIPPA

Will you kiss *them*?

ISABETTA

Certainly not!

FILIPPA

Then why bring them up?

ISABETTA

I was just - Look, Santangelo will not be an apprentice for long. You heard how the men spoke of him at breakfast.

FILIPPA

What if he is an apprentice for a very long time? You heard Master Cosimo, yes? He'll have to die before Santangelo takes his place.

ISABETTA

But he's so old! He can barely climb out of bed, let alone up the scaffolding in the cathedral.

FILIPPA

Maybe, but he's been old for a long time. The only thing that changes about Cosimo are his apprentices. Santangelo is his third since my first communion.

ISABETTA

So, what happens to them?

FILIPPA

They move on. Poppa can only train them so long before he has to either promote them or let them go. Santangelo will probably go in spring, and they'll bring on someone new.

(enter Santangelo. He tries to conceal himself, but Filippa spots him immediately)

Speak of the devil, there he is now!

ISABETTA

Santangelo!

SANTANGELO

(exiting the bushes)

We're about to leave, but I told Master Cosimo I'd forgotten my favorite knife.

ISABETTA

You'll get in trouble!

SANTANGELO

He moves too slow. I can catch up.

(SANTANGELO takes ISABETTA'S hands. They stare into each other's eyes for a long moment before they notice Filippa's captivated stare.)

ISABETTA

Filippa, run along upstairs. It's nearly time for your lessons.

FILIPPA

But -

ISABETTA

Go up and get out your slate and embroidery. I'll be along presently.

(exit FILIPPA in a huff, making loud kissing noises as on the long way across stage. SANTANGELO draws ISABETTA close and kisses her, his hands roaming. Isabetta returns his affections briefly, but then draws away.)

SANTANGELO

Is something wrong, my love?

ISABETTA

I was thinking ... Santangelo, last night you said Master Cosimo would surely retire soon, and that, when he did, you would be the new *Maestro di Faccia*.

SANTANGELO

Yes, and he will. One day he will decide that he's had enough.

ISABETTA

And when will that be? Has he said anything to you? Has Maestro Niccolo?

SANTANGELO

Not as such, no.

ISABETTA

So what makes you so certain?

SANTANGELO

Just look at him! I know how hard it is for him to get up and down these days, especially in winter.

ISABETTA

But it won't be winter forever, will it?

SANTANGELO

I suppose not.

ISABETTA

And Master Cosimo will feel better when the weather gets warmer, yes?

SANTANGELO

I guess so, sure.

ISABETTA

And what then? What if you've learned all you can and Cosimo has still not stepped aside? What will you do then?

SANTANGELO

I would move on, I suppose.

ISABETTA

Move *where*?

SANTANGELO

A larger city, one with opportunities for someone with talent and a letter of introduction: Florence, maybe, or Rome. I'd send for you, of course! It might be a year or two before I'm settled in, but then you'd come and we could be wed!

ISABETTA

I don't want to wait a year or two! I don't want you to leave me here, alone, while you carouse in the wine shops and brothels!

SANTANGELO

I told you, I've given that up!

ISABETTA

You also told me that Cosimo was sure to retire!

SANTANGELO

What would you have me do? It is his choice to work as long as he is able. There is nothing wrong with his brush work. His hand is still steady.

ISABETTA

Is it really only *his* choice?

SANTANGELO

I don't follow.

ISABETTA

I think it is time that you took matters into your own hands. You need to be assertive.

SANTANGELO

I do?

ISABETTA

Find an opportunity, sometime when the two of you are alone. You can be quite *convincing* when you need to be.

(She strokes his cheek).

SANTANGELO

I can?

ISABETTA

Yes, you can! Now, *vai, vai!* And remember, when the opportunity presents itself, take it!

SANTANGELO

Yes!

ISABETTA

Be a man!

SANTANGELO

Yes!

(exit SANTANGELO)

ISABETTA

(sighs)

At least he's handsome.

(beat)

I hope Master Niccolo hears him out.

ACT I  
SCENE FIVE

The scaffolding in the Cathedral, where Cosimo is just reaching the top of the ladder. He sighs and wearily climbs the last few rungs.

SANTANGELO

(offstage)

Could you hurry, signore? These supplies are very heavy.

COSIMO

Patience ... patience, boy. Just a few rungs to go.

(COSIMO slumps, gasping, onto a pile of ropes. A moment later, SANTANGELO appears on the ladder. He drops a large sack onto the platform and removes tools and painting implements. Cosimo slowly stands, gazing up and out at the ceiling of the cathedral.)

COSIMO

You know, Santangelo, I don't think I will ever grow tired of this.

SANTANGELO

Tired of what, Signore?

COSIMO

Tired of *this*! Hundreds of years from now, people will look up and be inspired by our work. They will look at the altarpieces, at the frescoes, and they will be that much closer to the almighty. Perhaps some may be considering a misdeed, or wrestling with a terrible decision, and they will find strength in the paintings and sculpture around them. Maybe a young artist will realize his true calling by seeing the things we paint today.

SANTANGELO

Do you think they'll know it was us who did it?

COSIMO

You or I? I would think not. They might remember Maestro Niccolo. It is his studio after all, but what does it matter? I do not do this for fame, nor should you! This is a divine calling, lad, no less important than a priest's, and our work is an act of devotion, of piety. I could never give it up.

And, if I happen to earn a comfortable living along the way, it is hardly a sin, is it?

SANTANGELO

I suppose not. But, master, what of your knees? It takes you a little longer to make the climb every day.

COSIMO

Then I'll start a little bit earlier each morning. Besides, it won't be winter forever, will it now?

SANTANGELO

So I've been told.

COSIMO

Even so, I envy you.

SANTANGELO

Me?

COSIMO

You can go anywhere, *anywhere*. You know I will write you a letter than will open the doors of studios in Milan, Florence, and Rome, yes?

SANTANGELO

And I thank you, signore, most humbly, but -

(COSIMO silences him with a raised hand.)

COSIMO

Maestro Niccolo will do the same, but his word will carry far greater weight than mine. You are very talented, Santangelo, and there is a great deal of emotion - *sensitivity* - in your work. If you are smart, not to mention *lucky*, you can find a patron who will allow you to have your own studio.

SANTANGELO

That would be ... no, I'm just an apprentice. I would be content to assist Maestro Niccolo.

COSIMO

You're likelier to be commissioned by the Pope, himself! You've no reason to stay here past spring, or maybe summer, depending on when I locate a suitable replacement.

SANTANGELO

It's just that - well, it's complicated, *signore*.

COSIMO

Would that complication be a certain governess in your master's employ?

SANTANGELO

Yes, but, how did you know?

COSIMO

The cook is a terrible gossip.

Look, it has been a long time since I was your age.

SANTANGELO

(sotto voce)

I'll say.

COSIMO

What was that?

SANTANGELO

Nothing.

COSIMO

Oh. Then, where was I? Oh yes, as I was saying, it may be many years, but I haven't forgotten *everything*. Passion runs hot when you're young, and

especially so for you. It is easy to mistake passion for love, but the two are not the same. Passion is a house built of straw, love is a *home* built of stone. If she waits for you and you for her, then it was love, and it was meant to be. My guess is, you'll know long before then. Young women tend to be far more practical about this sort of thing than young men. She's a comely creature, your Isabetta, and there'll be other suitors. Why, even our own *Maestro di Piedi* has expressed an interest.

SANTANGELO

*Giovanni?*

COSIMO

The very same. If she's like other women I've known, then the security he could offer her will be difficult to resist. What he can't offer her in, ah ... other ways, she'll find for herself.

SANTANGELO

Like *Signora Agnesa*?

COSIMO

Like half the women and *all the men* from here to Palermo!  
(COSIMO drops something.)  
Mother Mary!

SANTANGELO

(crosses himself)  
What is it?

COSIMO

I dropped my brush.

SANTANGELO

Should I trim you another?

(With obvious pain, Cosimo sinks to one knee.)

COSIMO

No need, it only dropped onto the support, I can reach it.  
(COSIMO leans over the edge, his posterior prominently displayed to the audience and SANTANGELO.)

I can almost ... no, not quite.  
(He shifts slightly, his rump raised even higher.  
SANTANGELO looks pointedly at Cosimo's raised rear, then at the audience.)

You know, it really is quite dusty under here. I hate to do it, but you'll have to stay late and tidy up. The dust and cobwebs could drift onto wet paint if we don't get things cleaned up properly. I'll have Iacopo or Luca run some dinner to you.

(Santangelo, still looking at the audience, raises his eyebrow. He turns and approaches Cosimo on tiptoe.)

COSIMO

Oh, look, a penny!

(SANTANGELO places his foot squarely on Cosimo's rump and pushes. With a shriek, COSIMO plunges over the edge. SANTANGELO turns away, shocked by his impulsive action. He winces at a loud *splat* from far below. Almost immediately, there are shouts of alarm from offstage.)

## PAINTERS

(Off stage)

What was *that*? Did someone fall? Etc.

(Santangelo glances over the edge of the platform and draws back with a gasp of horror. He frantically paces the platform in mute panic.)

It's Cosimo! By the virgin! Is he dead? Of course he's dead, look at him!

## LUCA

(off stage)

Where's Santangelo?

## IACOPO

(Off stage)

Santangelo! Santangelo, are you all right?

BLACK OUT.

END ACT ONE