

# **Love in the Seventh Kingdom of Wrath**

by Kenneth Prestininzi

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## Characters

Michelangelo Merisi - *the painter known as Caravaggio. A bravo and lover.*

Cecco Boneri - *a street pick-up, a painter's model, an apprentice.*

Fillide Medroni - *a business woman, a beauty, a prostitute, a supporter of the arts.*

Angel of Darkness - *the actor playing the Angel of Darkness also plays Angel of Light, Angel of Desire, Angel of Correction, Fillide's servant and Cardinal Difetti.*

## NOTES:

The seven powers the soul must pass through are darkness, desire, ignorance, fascination with death, enslavement to the flesh, foolish wisdom, and wrath. Having successfully moved beyond them, the soul can become free and rest in eternal peace and silence.

The goal was to paint the Movement of the Soul: in anger, joy, sorrow, and fear.

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*Early 1600's, Italy. A dirty, hungry, scrambling Italy moves beneath the shine of St. Peter's dome.*

### First Bowl of Wrath: Darkness

*A bruised night of drink, sex and prayer floats in the sewers of the morning's sunny streets. A young girl, Beatriz Cenci will be marched through the streets to the scaffold where she will be executed in public.*

*There is a wooden platform on the stage, a stage on a stage. On the platform is a raised mattress. Michelangelo Merisi, the painter known as Caravaggio, a bravo, a lover and a middle-aged man, is sprawled across the mattress in the middle of his painter's studio. Beneath him, unseen except for a naked leg, is Cecco Boneri, a young man from the streets.*

*Above the sleeping Merisi, the Angel of Darkness sits and ponders. The Angel has a bit of a hangover and kicks strewn empty bottles to wake Merisi. The Angel belches.*

*The Angel listens to the church bells. It sits up and listens to the sounds of a mob following Beatriz Cenci as she is paraded through the streets on her way to the scaffolding.*

#### ANGEL OF DARKNESS

*(singing softly and sweetly to Merisi)*

Come watch the ones  
Condemned to die  
Come watch the ones  
Condemned to die  
Come watch the ones  
Condemned to die  
They let us watch -  
Death - in their eyes.

*The Angel of Darkness kicks Merisi's naked butt. It shoves him off the bed with its supernatural foot.*

#### MERISI

Mother of God...what...

#### ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Get up.

*Merisi goes to the water basin and throws water on his face.*

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

You have to go watch. She's already being paraded through the streets. Beatriz Cenzi. You said you wanted to see her guillotined.

MERISI

Is that today? Damn. Fuck me.

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Who's the boy?

MERISI

Him? God, what is his name?

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Listen.

*They listen to the mob.*

Hurry. You'll miss the moment of death. The clean violence. The blade's kiss. Her lovely neck.

MERISI

You're encouraging me?

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Get dressed. You're missing everything.

MERISI

Are you my guardian?

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Don't be a sentimental idiot. Get dressed.

MERISI

Are you? My angel?

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

I'm the darkness.

MERISI

Get lost. It's morning. I've washed my face.

*The Angel of Darkness strikes Merisi.*

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Get dressed. Don't make us miss this.

MERISI

I'd bash you for that if you weren't a supernumerary.

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

I'm a Stronghold, not a supernumerary. Learn the difference or you'll make me angry.  
And I lose control when I'm angered.

*Merisi puts on a shirt, stuffs it in his breeches, and slips on shoes.*

MERISI

Yes, yes, yes, I'm getting dressed. I need to go watch...study her moment of death.

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Don't make us miss it.

MERISI

You should have woke me earlier.

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

I'll smite you.

MERISI

I'm dressed.

*The Angel of Darkness and Merisi step off the platform and into the streets.*

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Everyone wants to look at her. The girl who killed her father.

MERISI

Can you see her? I need a better view.

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Lovely girl.  
See the blue in her eyes.  
She killed her father after he raped a seventh time.  
A pure blue.  
Go to the scaffold, witness what lives inside a girl condemned to die.  
Behold her bare feet...

MERISI

Lift me up. I can't see...

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Her untroubled brow. Her lifted head. Her small budding chest. She's killed her father a thousand times. And then just once – as he bit into his venison. She need never kill him again.

MERISI

PARDON! PARDON!

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Don't waste your breath. Study such a girl. Without hope, without fear. Her eye. Her hips. The pulse in her neck. Listen. Her voice is bright and thin – but with all this shouting, no one hears her sing:

*(as Beatriz:)*

I did what I had to do. I praise God  
I praise God. I praise God.  
He held my hand. He holds me now.

The blade is raise.

MERISI

PARDON! PARDON!

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

We've come to watch the one condemned to die.

Look at her feet, her bare little girl's feet.

MERISI

How dirty they are...her dirty feet will make me cry. She's looking at the crowd, she won't cast down her eyes, she's looking at people straight in the eye. She's...

...looking at me...

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

In her mind's eye, she killed her father a thousand times.

*ANGEL (suddenly transformed as Beatriz)*

And once, just once, with the knife he held to cut his meat – a deer he killed. Venison.

MERISI

That frail little girl killed her father...

ANGEL of DARKNESS

Study her. Her lips, her chin, her wrists – so thin. That's why you're here with the rest of these plebes. Not to gawk, not to taunt, but to make a study.

MERISI

I'm ashamed...

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

You should be. You're human after all. And an artist. You're not like the rest, not a member of a cruel-hearted crowd. Such a display. Women clutch – weep. Young men turn crimson. Old become stone. But they're all so alive, gathered here to watch her die.

MERISI

Strike them down. They block my view.

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

PARDON! PARDON! - the people cry. No pardon comes - she must die.

MERISI

Her eyes.

ANGEL of DARKNESS

Up the scaffold. Her bare feet. Her untroubled brow. Her lifted head. Her proud chest. Aren't you glad you I woke you in time? She's killed her father a thousand times. And once, just once...

MERISI

As he tasted venison.

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

She need never kill him again

MERISI

Is it Love or Wrath burning in her eyes,,?

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

She kneels. Condemned. The man in black reveals her neck

MERISI

PARDON! PARDON!

ANGEL of DARKNESS

The people cry. But they lie.

MERISI

They lie...?

ANGEL of DARKNESS

They've come to watch her die. She must die. How can any God forgive patricide?

MERISI

PARDON! PARDON!

ANGEL (*as Beatriz*)

I did what I had to do. I praise God. I praise God. I praise God. He held my hand...

MERISI

PARDON! PARDON!

*The sound of whoosh - a blade – and the scream of a crowd.  
The Angel of Darkness imitates the blade and the scream of the crowd.  
All is silent.  
Then the mob weeps.  
Merisi stands transfixed.*

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

They weep. Now they weep.

MERISI

Murder the crowd.

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Be my guest.

MERISI

I'm not an angel of God. You could have rescued her. Patricide? Her father raped her.

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

I can do no more than what I'm allowed. Revenge is taken on any who take the Law in their own hands

MERISI

Did you see her eyes after her head dropped to the ground? How the blood drained from the brow? Was her mouth locked or did it smile after the head was severed from her body?

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

The mouth locked.

MERISI

Did you see how the veins pulsed in her neck as if she were still alive? As if her head were not on the ground?

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

You can use what you saw here today.



MERISI

Yes.

ANGEL of DARKNESS

Let's go to the tavern. Will you buy me a drink? Pay for some company for us two?  
Get this taste of death out of our mouths?

MERISI

You can't ask for such things. You're an angel. From the kingdom of God.

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

I'm allowed.

MERISI

Quiet. They're holding up her head! Dear God...

*Merisi stares transfixed.*

ANGEL (*as the head of Beatriz*)

I did what I had to do  
You must do what you must do  
The sweetest joy is to die where you are true  
Let Love murder your heart too

You're alone.  
God pity you.

*Sound of the whoosh of the executioner's ax swinging up, catching the light.  
There might be a cutting slash of light against a sudden blackness.*

*In the blackness:*

MERISI

DO NOT PITY ME.

*Sound of the whoosh of the executioner's ax swinging up and coming down on  
her neck. There might be a cutting slash of light against a sudden blackness.*

*In the darkness:*

MERISI

ANGEL! ANGEL! WHERE ARE YOU? GODDAMN YOU.

*Morning light.  
Merisi is back in his studio.  
His shouting upsets the sleeping Cecco.*

CECCO

Mother of God, what is it...?

MERISI

THEY STOOD THERE AND WATCHED. THEY CUT OFF HER HEAD AND PUT IT ON A STICK. THESE ARE THE BEST, PEOPLE OF GOD, ROMAN CITIZENS, PEOPLE OF GOD. I HATE ALL HUMANITY. LET ME DIE ALONE. FAR FROM GOD'S PEOPLE AND PITY.

CECCO

Yeah, yeah, yeah – so you said. I told you not to go.

MERISI

I'm not a coward. I had to...

CECCO

You called me angel in your sleep.

MERISI

I didn't.

*Cecco gets put of bed and starts to dress.*

MERISI

Taking a piss?

CECCO

Marketplace..

MERISI

Don't steal from my purse today.

CECCO

I'm hungry.

MERISI

Don't make me rise up and knock you down. Come over here. What do I pay you for?

CECCO

Grind your powder into paint. So you said. Clean your studio. Pose in shafts of light.

MERISI

I said you could do that on the side. I pay you to obey. To do as I say.

CECCO

What's my name?

MERISI

So obey. Go to the market. Get breakfast.

CECCO

My name.

MERISI

Baptist. David. What difference does it make? Jesus Christ. You want me to know your name? If I have to remember your name, you can pay me.

CECCO

Say my name.

MERISI

Angel.

CECCO

No.

MERISI

Baptist.

CECCO

No.

MERISI

Thief.

CECCO

I haven't stolen from you.

MERISI

You will.

CECCO

I let you get me drunk because I thought you'd nice.

MERISI

Nice? No one lies down with me because they think I'll be nice.

CECCO

Say it. My name.

MERISI

David. Sizing up the Giant. David. Young and unafraid.

Wrong. CECCO

Temptation. Temptation at my pillow. MERISI

My name's Cecco Boneri, fucker. CECCO

Stay. I'd like to paint you. I'll pay. MERISI

In advance. CECCO

*He takes money from Merisi's purse.*

Thank you.

When you get back, you can also wash the gutter out. MERISI

Out of my mouth? CECCO

Out of your ass. MERISI

*Merisi tries to pull him back into bed. Cecco pushes him away.  
It turns into a real fight. Cecco fights him off and gets away.*

You think you can fight me? I can break you in half. You stupid street trick. MERISI

I'm not stupid. CECCO

You think you're so cute. MERISI

You don't know what I think. Get off of me. CECCO

Stealing men's hearts. Sucking cock. MERISI

CECCO

I'll cut you.

*Merisi rips opens his shirt.*

MERISI

Cut out my heart. I dare you. C'mon, Cupid. Finish what you start. You piss. You fart. You tush of love. You silken tallow prick. You little godling upstart. You smear of amor. Mush of my heart. You cheat. You bang. You nutmeat. You foulsmelling tart. You cupid. Dan Cupid. Pitstain of art.

*They laugh.*

*They calm down, then laugh more. At nothing.*

CECCO

You're loco. They warned me about you. You never know with him, they said.

MERISI

I'm a Knight of Christ. I won't be treated as anything less!

CECCO

What are you talking about? I want to get us breakfast without you clawing me. Get off. I don't want to kiss you.

MERISI

I woke up wrong. I had a bad dream. Be nice. Forgive me.

CECCO

It'll cost you.

*Cecco takes more money from the purse, but then takes the whole purse.*

MERISI

Are you coming back?

CECCO

Say my name.

*Merisi cries out in frustration.*

*Cecco exits.*

*Fillede Mendroni enters. She travels with her servant who looks exactly like the Angel of Darkness. She is a business woman, a beauty, a prostitute, and a supporter of the arts.*

So. What's this one's name?  
FILLIDE

Don't get on me today. It's already a bad day.  
MERISI

You don't know.  
FILLIDE

Cecco Boneri. But don't give him the satisfaction of telling him I know.  
MERISI

It's not likely I'll see him again, is it?  
FILLIDE

Don't start with me, whore.  
MERISI

I don't find my companions in the streets. I'm the Virgin Mary next to you.  
FILLIDE

*The servant laughs. Merisi strikes him.*

What's wrong with you?  
FILLIDE

Honor. No man's allowed to laugh at me.  
MERISI

Apologize.  
FILLIDE

To a servant?  
MERISI

To me.  
FILLIDE

Everyone is making me mad, and I haven't had coffee.  
MERISI

You invited me. It's past noon.  
FILLIDE

I believe you, but I've no memory.  
MERISI

FILLIDE

You were sober when you did.

MERISI

That's a lie. I've been drunk every day of my life since I was ten.

FILLIDE

You asked me to sit. That's why I walked through the streets without my mask on. You said I was to sit so you could paint St. Catherine.

*The servant laughs.*

*Fillide strikes him.*

FILLIDE

Dog, go buy us some lunch.

MERISI

It's on its way.

FILLIDE

That boy? He won't be back. Here. Go.

*The servant takes money from her and exits.*

FILLIDE

You look a wreck.

MERISI

I saw them cut off her head yesterday.

FILLIDE

You're barbaric. You think that's entertainment?

MERISI

I cried my heart out. But you're right. I couldn't stay away. It was fantastic. I grew hoarse shouting, "Pardon! Pardon!" And then I vomited in the street.

FILLIDE

I knew she wouldn't be pardoned. Patricide? They had to make her a spectacle, so fathers could once again sleep.

MERISI

It was perfectly staged. The hate and violence – was so contained. The picture designed itself. The light from the blade reflected on her pale neck. God is dark and violent and that's what people recognize – the wrath in his love. The kiss of death. Her neck was a thing of a beauty.

FILLIDE

Before or after she was guillotined?

*Merisi throws water on his face.*

MERISI

This is how the new year begins. Hate, violence and you calling me names.

FILLIDE

My man's mad at you. Yes, you have to listen to this. Now that I'm with him, you're not to be familiar with me, or speak vulgarly about me, no more taking liberties.

MERISI

Tomasino's whore is to be treated with more dignity?

FILLIDE

Yes.

MERISI

Shall I paint you as the Virgin Mary?

FILLIDE

Yes.

MERISI

I will. And we'll hang you in St. Peter's Church.

FILLIDE

Good.

MERISI

Imagine.

FILLIDE

No one will permit a whore to sit for the Holy Mother.

MERISI

Do you think I take liberties?

FILLIDE

Next time, I won't stop Tomasino from having his guards cut you down. Tomasino is not the kind of man you want as an enemy.

MERISI

He's a coward. If he were half the man...



Is that Catherine's wheel? FILLIDE

Yes. MERISI

*He sits her in his studio. A light from a high window hits her just so.  
He smiles.*

Give me a sword. I want you to paint her testing its edge. FILLIDE

*He gives her his sword.*

I love you, Saint Catherine. MERISI

Show me your cock. FILLIDE

Whore. MERISI

Mirror. FILLIDE

Shut up and sit for me. That's what I pay you for. MERISI

*She begins to undress.  
He hands her a costume from the rack.*

I thought you were through with street boys. FILLIDE

*He undoes her hair, smells it, and musses it.  
They enjoy this. He poses her just so.*

What's this? Another bruise? MERISI

What of it? You're not the only one who fights in bed. FILLIDE

*They go into sitter and painter mode.*

MERISI

You should cut his throat. Like Judith. Grab him by the hair. While he snores. One clean yank up of the head and across with the knife. You were a farm girl. You know how it's done.

FILLIDE

He's bought exclusive rights to me. He wants to lock me up in his house. Know my every move. He even hates when I come here and sit for you. I tell him all of Rome knows you have no interest in girls. He says that pervert will fuck whoever lifts their skirt, mother or pope. I thought that was pretty good. And accurate.

MERISI

Let's play a bed trick on him. Tell him you'll visit him in his bed tonight, but he must put out all the lamps. You'll find him by his scent. I'll enter, dressed as you, and straddle him, hold him down, yank him up by the hair, since he likes it rough, then pull out my sword and cut off his head.

FILLIDE

Kiss him first. Thrust your tongue down his throat. Then cut off his head.

MERISI

Hmmm.

FILLIDE

Huh.

*They are both aroused.  
He approaches her to change her pose.  
He holds her breasts in his hands.*

MERISI

Here. Sit on this stool. Look at the ground. Toss your hair. Rub out your eyes.

FILLIDE

For Saint Catherine?

MERISI

Magdalene.

FILLIDE

O, that Mary. I should have known. At what moment?

MERISI

Jesus is dead. Before you seek him out at the tomb.

FILLIDE

Why can't you paint a woman full of joy, in her glory?

MERISI

I did. Judith. Cutting a man's throat.

FILLIDE

Everything is death and despair with you.

MERISI

You want me to paint you in your full glory? Get on the bed.

FILLIDE

May you die lonely. Lonely and disfigured.

MERISI

Sweetheart.

FILLIDE

And after you die, may no one bathe you.

MERISI

Are you mad at me? What did I say?

FILLIDE

Magdalene was glorious. She was an apostle.

MERISI

That's what you're angry about?

FILLIDE

She was an apostle, not a whore.

MERISI

And I would never fuck the Pope.

FILLIDE

An apostle. She is not the woman that Jesus saved from being stoned. They are not one and the same.

MERISI

I don't believe in any of it. Why are you yelling at me?

FILLIDE

You insult her. And you insult me.

MERISI

Go back to being Catherine.

FILLIDE

You want to paint the Magdalene? Paint her the moment she finds God.

MERISI

Calm down.

FILLIDE

You can't. You understand me? You can't paint her then.

MERISI

It's too early in the morning. I saw a girl killed today.

FILLIDE

You can't.

MERISI

You want her in clouds surrounded by cherubs? You're right, I can't.

FILLIDE

You can't imagine a woman can know God.

MERISI

I can. Sitting alone. Her eyes closed. Because grace comes from within.

*They are silent.*

*Fillide closes her eyes.*

FILLIDE

I may one day.

MERISI

Hear God?

FILLIDE

I'm worthy of His grace.

MERISI

Fall off a horse. They say it worked for Paul.

FILLIDE

I hate you sometimes.

MERISI

That girl thought she found grace. Then God let her be decapitated. I shouted until my lungs leapt out of me. PARDON. What good did it do?

FILLIDE

None.

*Fillide sits.*

*She tests the edge of the sword.*

MERISI

Finger the edge. Look at me.

*He studies.*

FILLIDE

I was there too. In the back.

MERISI

Shhh.

FILLIDE

I saw it in her eyes.

MERISI

What did you see?

FILLIDE

Love. For her father. She was free to love him, at last.

MERISI

She stabbed him with the steak knife.

FILLIDE

At the moment of her death. Forgiveness.

*Fillide is silent.*

FILLIDE

Haven't you ever wanted to...murder the one you loved more than anyone? For the things he'd done. No? Never? Coward. You've never been in love. And you've never been brave enough to let yourself be loved in return.

MERISI

Women are all so eager to be abused.

FILLIDE

Coward.

MERISI

I'll slap you.

FILLIDE

Jesus loved Magdalene, more than any other apostle.

MERISI

He told her to go home, live free of sin.

FILLIDE

That's the other one, that wasn't Magdalene. Magdalene became his apostle of apostles. A man finally sees her for who she is, loves her for the woman she is.

MERISI

He loves her? Even though she can never be his/

FILLIDE

Yes, he loves her. Even though she can never be his.

*They are silent.*

*She stands and takes off the costume. She puts on her clothes.*

MERISI

Are you leaving? What did I say now?

FILLIDE

I'm done, yes. My dog never came back with our lunch.

MERISI

Why is everyone so goddamn sensitive? It makes me mad.

FILLIDE

Poor MERISI.

MERISI

I'm insulted every day. Boys off the street break my heart as if I'm a schoolgirl.

FILLIDE

Schoolgirls I know better, they learn to be impenetrable.

MERISI

Don't leave...I'm afraid. Something happened to me yesterday.

FILLIDE

Do you know why Magdalene agreed to follow the man they called Jesus?

MERISI

He said nice things to her?

FILLIDE

He washed her feet.

MERISI

That's the answer?

FILLIDE

You paint saints for the Church, but you never get to the truth of feet.

MERISI

I'll paint the dirt on your feet. Stay.

FILLIDE

Do you love me, MERISI? Do you love anyone or anything?

MERISI

Sit.

FILLIDE

I'm not your dog.

MERISI

Sit, Magdalene. Let me wash your feet.

*She sits.*

*He kneels before her with the water basin and a cloth.  
He washes her feet.*

*They are surprised by how intimate this is.  
It is a new feeling for both of them.  
Both don't want to speak, afraid it will break the intimacy.*

*POUNDING at the door.*

MAN'S VOICE (TOMASINO)

MERISI! Throw that bitch out here in the streets where I can kick her into the gutter for all to see.

*Merisi calmly washes Fillide's feet.*

TOMASINO'S VOICE  
YOU CAN'T TREAT ME THIS WAY. I'LL BREAK YOUR LEGS. YOU MAGGOT  
INFESTED BITCH.

FILLIDE  
Don't answer.

TOMASINO'S VOICE  
HOW DARE YOU TALK TO MY WIFE. I'LL CUT OUT YOUR TONGUE. BITCH.

*POUNDING.*  
I WORSHIP YOU.

*POUNDING.*  
FILLIDE  
BEAT THE DOOR TO DEATH. GO AHEAD. DO YOU THINK I CARE ABOUT YOUR  
THREATS?

TOMASINO'S VOICE  
I WORSHIP YOU.

*POUNDING.*  
TOMASINO'S VOICE  
I'LL DRAG YOU THROUGH THE STREETS BY YOUR FEET. I'LL CUT OFF YOUR  
TITS. OPEN THE GODDAMN DOOR.

*POUNDING.*  
*Silence.*  
*They remain silent.*  
*FIERCE POUNDING.*

*Merisi dries her washed feet.*

FILLIDE  
Look at me.

*He does.*  
*Silence.*  
*They kiss.*  
*FIERCE POUNDING.*

*End of part one.*



### Interlude: Prayer

*Fillide sprawls on the bed, content.*

*Merisi kneels by the bed, head bowed. She studies him.*

FILLIDE

Are you praying...do you even know how?

MERISI

Our Father  
Who art in heaven  
Get to work...help me...

Find a lover  
Fight for honor  
Fight and fuck  
Offend  
Murder if I have to  
Without hope without fear  
And when they stuff me in a hole in the ground  
And tell me my soul is damned...

FILLIDE

Forgive me all my sins before I die.

*She dresses.*

MERISI

Let me look my Maker in the eye.  
Without hope, without fear.  
Amen.

FILLIDE

Amen.

MERISI

Will you go back to him?

FILLIDE

You inviting me to stay here with you?

A knock on the door.  
*She unbolts the door.*  
*Cecco enters carrying a basket of fruit.*

CECCO  
What's she doing here?

*She grabs a ripe pear.*

FILLIDE  
We were saying our morning prayers.

MERISI  
Amen.

FILLIDE  
Ciao.

*Filiide exits.*

CECCO  
You kill me.

MERISI  
I'm hungry. What did you bring?

*Merisi takes the basket.*

CECCO  
I can't believe you. When did you start believing in prayer.

*Merisi eats fruit.*

MERISI  
Grind the chocolate browns. We have work to do today.

CECCO  
I'm not...

*Merisi puts fruit in Cecco's mouth.*

MERISI  
No one wants your lover's opinion. Now, get to work, or get out.

*Merisi goes to work.*

CECCO  
You think you're so grand. I know what you are. You don't fool me. Prayer.  
Fuck. You pray? Ha.

MERISI  
I don't aim to fool. And I pray every morning.

CECCO  
Except yourself.

MERISI  
What's that?

CECCO  
Nothing.

MERISI  
What am I? Mouth, what am I?

CECCO  
A big man. A bravo.

MERISI  
That's right.

CECCO  
A Goliath.

MERISI  
Get to work.

CECCO  
You're a man whose heart breaks often, whose brow no kiss can soften.

MERISI  
Get out.

CECCO  
I've never heard or seen you pray.

*Cecco grinds paint.*

MERISI  
Every morning.

CECCO  
You make demands. That's not prayer.

*Silence.*

MERISI

Dear Lord and Master, Father of all that's honorable and worthy in the world,

*(praying as he works:)*

Why is every morning a struggle?

Why did you make me this way? Passionate and loud?

Why do you make me drink? Pick fights and bite boys' lips 'til they're red?

Why do you bring me mornings that make me wish I were dead?

Must every morning be a struggle? When will I be satisfied?

Every morning I'm angry all over again. Every morning. Every morning.

Will I be punished for what's in my head?

What if I don't want to be forgiven for my sins?

Will forgiveness make me cry out in bed?

Every morning.

A fucking struggle.

Why have you made me this way? God?

I don't understand.

Why don't my prayers bring me peace? Why don't my prayers make me strong?

Shall I paint your cruelty once again?

Amen.

*End of prayer.*

## Second Bowl: Desire

*Cecco sits naked in bed holding a basket of fruit.  
Merisi sits on the floor repairing a set of angel wings..*

*Cecco throws grapes at Merisi. Merisi ignores him.  
Merisi holds up the wings, not sure if he is satisfied.*

MERISI

Try them on.

*Cecco walks over and slips on he wings.*

Take them off.

*Cecco does. Merisi goes back to mending the wings.  
Cecco returns to the bed.*

CECCO

I'm done with this life.

MERISI

Which life is that?

CECCO

Living off my wits.

MERISI

That's one way to name it.

CECCO

Turning tricks.

MERISI

What will you do instead?

CECCO

Stay with you. Work in your studio. Apprentice. Learn to paint.

MERISI

I'm done with this life too.

CECCO

What do you mean?

MERISI  
Believing anyone good will ever want to stay with me.

CECCO  
I'm not sure I know what you mean.

MERISI  
I didn't think you would.

CECCO  
I saved you last night. That man in the tavern was ready to do you in.

MERISI  
Maybe I wanted to be done in.

CECCO  
Who can understand you? You almost got stuck with a knife. What was that argument about?

MERISI  
You.

CECCO  
You eat shit for breakfast.

MERISI  
Agostino said he asked you to come to his studio to model.

CECCO  
So?

MERISI  
My Cecco model for Augustino?

CECCO  
He asked me. Maybe I will.

MERISI  
To strip...

CECCO  
Pose. As John the Baptist.

MERISI  
But you said no.

CECCO

Why shouldn't I? He works quickly and he can pay quickly too.

MERISI

Because he has no skill or ability to paint from reality. That's why.

CECCO

Talent isn't everything.

MERISI

You bit your thumb at him.

CECCO

He gets commissions from Signor Rapaci and Cardinal Difetti. That's reality enough for me.

MERISI

You're a dog I should kick back into the street.

CECCO

I know where I come from. I'm not ashamed of it.

MERISI

You're mine, not his! *My Cupid. My Baptist.*

CECCO

THEN GIVE ME WHAT I NEED.

*Stare down.*

MERISI

Do what you must do.

CECCO

I can't. I wish I could. You have no clue. NO CLUE. GOD, HOW I HATE YOU. I'm going. You make me so...I could kill you.

*Cecco dresses.*

*He stands at the door, ready to leave.*

Well?

MERISI

Don't return.

*Cecco exits.*

*Merisi throws the fruit basket after him.*

MERISI

CECCO!  
BARDASSA! BOY!  
COME BACK HERE.

*The Angel of Desire, who looks exactly like the Angel of Darkness, enters.  
The Angel picks up a fruit. It bites into it. It makes a face and spits out a worm.*

ANGEL OF DESIRE

We all pity you.

MERISI

SHUT UP.

ANGEL OF DESIRE

All the angels. Up the hierarchy. Snake to the Throne.

MERISI

I'm happy.

ANGEL OF DESIRE

We all know how much you desire the boy. And how much that angers you.

MERISI

Go bother someone who actually prays to you.

ANGEL OF DESIRE

Who desires more than you? We'd fuck him too, if we could.

MERISI

Finding someone else to fuck will be easy.

ANGEL OF DESIRE

You never wanted to paint your fucks before. He saw you coming a mile away.

MERISI

I spied him. I picked him up off the street.

ANGEL OF DESIRE

He let you think you did.

*Merisi starts shoving the Angel out the door.  
The Angel slams him to the ground.*



ANGEL OF DESIRE

We're about ready to give up on you. Crazy bastard. You can't shove a magnificent Angel. Your wrath is no match for ours.

*Merisi keeps shoving the Angel.*

*The Angel of Desire grabs hold of him.*

*They wrestle.*

*The Angel shoves Merisi's face to the floor and puts Merisi in a life-threatening hold.*

We'll break you.

MERISI

Do. I want to die...

*Cecco enters.*

*The open door lets sunlight into the studio.*

*The Angel of Desire disappears into the shadows of the room.*

*Merisi crawls away from Cecco, revealing the shredded angel wings he was working on.*

CECCO

What did you do?

MERISI

They wouldn't behave.

CECCO

You're mad.

MERISI

I am.

CECCO

Look what I have: Bread. Butter. SALAMI!

MERISI

You think I'll eat anything paid for by Agostoni, Rapaci and Difetti?

CECCO

No one paid. I stole all of it.

MERISI

A thief.

CECCO  
I won't pose for Agostino. Now, will you eat?

*Merisi won't look at Cecco.  
Cecco studies him as they eat lunch.*

CECCO  
Better now?

MERISI  
I'm not mad, Cecco.

CECCO  
What are you then?

MERISI  
I'm in love.

Cecco kisses Merisi's hand and eats the bread he's holding.

CECCO  
Good. I guess that means I get to stay?

MERISI  
I want to kill you.

CECCO  
You'll teach me what you know? Keep me off the streets?

MERISI  
If you work hard.

CECCO  
Sounds like a contract to me.

MERISI  
And do you?

CECCO  
Do I what?

MERISI  
Do you want to kill me too?

CECCO

Everyday.

*Cecco begins repairing the wings.*

But I'm sure you'll get someone angry in the tavern, and they'll kill you for me. I'll be sad, but then I can love you in peace.

*Merisi eats his lunch in peace.*

*The Angel of Desire walks out the door.*

*End of part two.*

### **Third bowl: Ignorance**

*Fillide as Saint Catherine sits with a sword before the torture wheel.*

*She stares down the audience.*

SAINT CATHERINE

Go, therefore, and preach the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Or will you be a reluctant messenger?

If the Savior made the whore worthy, who are you to reject her?

The Savior's knowledge of her is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than any of the others.

There is no sin in the kingdom of Love. There is no Death.

You get sick and die because you do not love, because your wrath blinds and deceives you.

*End of part three.*

#### **Fourth bowl: Excitement of Death**

*The Angel of Darkness sleeps with his arm and leg over MERISI trapping him in the bed. Merisi tries to get out from under the Angel, but the Angel's limbs are too heavy and dominant.*

MERISI

Get off me.

*The Angel of Darkness rolls and lies even more on top of Merisi.*

Get off me! Get off...

*Merisi uses all his strength to push the Angel off him. The Angel does not seem to wake but becomes immovable. The Angel's body tries to smother the painter. Merisi fights harder. He gets out from under the Angel. He beats the dormant Angel. He beats and beats the Angel, deadening it. The Angel lies there, destroyed.*

*Merisi covers it with a sheet.*

*He sits on the corner of the mattress and his body shakes.*

*His body calms down to atremble and then is still.*

*Merisi stands and moves about his studio. He sets a few objects in place. He mixes paint.*

*He goes back to the body under the sheets.  
He takes a sword and cuts off its head.  
He lifts the head and stares at it.*

*He holds it up in front of the mirror.*

*He returns to his paints.*

*End of part four.*

## **Fifth Bowl: Kingdom of flesh**

MERISI

Cecco, grind, I want chocolate brown. Old man yellow. Dried blood red. No blues. I hate sky blues. Blues are for girly priests and idealists. I'm no idealist. Cecco? Grind. Behave.

CECCO

I don't want to behave. Being an apprentice is not as fun s I thought it'd be.

MERISI

It's work.

CECCO

I know it's work.

MERISI

Shut up and work.

CECCO

You think I'm stupid.

MERISI

I think you have street smarts.

CECCO

I'm not stupid, some stupid beauty for you to drool upon.

MERISI

Beauty? No, you're not.

CECCO

What am I then?

MERISI

What are you? A paint grinder.

CECCO

No.

MERISI

An act of mercy.

CECCO

What does that mean?

MERISI

I have a headache. Let's not have an argument.

CECCO

A mercy? What's that mean? I want to mean something.

MERISI

Headache. Grind.

CECCO

You still think I belong in the street?

MERISI

You belong between my legs under the sheets.

CECCO

I'm not an act of mercy and I'm not a trick. I'm the apprentice to the greatest painter living in Rome today. I'm his apprentice. This is my studio. This is my home. These are my wings. My name is Cecco Boneri. Remember me? You took me on as an apprentice to your mastery. Treat me like it.

MERISI

You are stupid.

CECCO

You said you believed in me.

MERISI

I never did.

CECCO

You did!

MERISI

I may have said I loved you. I never said...

CECCO

You don't?

MERISI

I've no patience for this kind of argument.

*He pours himself a mug of wine.*

CECCO

Can you love me and not believe in me?

MERISI

O, God, yes.

CECCO

What do you love about me then? Besides my stupidity.

MERISI

Your closed mouth. Your pout.

CECCO

My flesh.

MERISI

Your youth. It's idiocy.

CECCO

You asked me to stay because I showed promise.

MERISI

When did I ask you to stay?

CECCO

I'm different than the rest. Admit it.

MERISI

I said you could stay. I didn't ask you to stay. I said you could. You could stay, should stay, that it'd make life easier. But I didn't ask you to stay.

CECCO

You said you wanted me at your deathbed.

MERISI

I said no such thing.

CECCO

When you do die, die alone then. No one there to weep for you.

MERISI

I'll be dead. I won't need tears.

CECCO

I hope you die under a hot sun. Far away. Blackened by a disease. Smoked by a fever. Knocked to the ground. No one coming to your aid. I hope your tears burn out the insides of your eyes, while I sit somewhere eating grapes, in someone else's studio. And after your funeral, I'll come back here and throw thick black paint from a knife over every canvas left behind.

MERISI

You want to be someone I believe in? Get out of my studio and look at the world around you with fierce scrutiny. Fight for honor. Get drunk. Murder. Take a lover. Beg pardon. How else will learn to foreshorten and balance color? You think loving you means I must lie about the one thing I believe in?

CECCO

Why not? I lie to you.

MERISI

I'm a man of honor.

CECCO

To keep the peace.

MERISI

You have no honor.

CECCO

I have no desire for you. I let you believe I do.

MERISI

You're a fucking good liar then.

CECCO

I am.

MERISI

You think your rutting little spasms mean anything to me?

CECCO

I mean something.

MERISI

Do you love me?

CECCO

You don't deserve me.

MERISI

I deserve an apprentice who attends to my needs. I'm going to be important. I am important. I have real ambitions.

CECCO

So do I.



MERISI

You don't love me. Yes or no?

CECCO

I'm a liar. Believe what you want to believe. I've never wanted you to touch me.

*Merisi strikes him.*

*Both are stunned.*

MERISI

Clean my brushes. You've made me mad.

*Cecco exits the studio.*

You've let them get caked with filth. They're disgusting.

*He grabs and throws his brushes.*

Filthy. THEY'RE FILTHY.

*He intentionally hurts himself.*

*He whimpers in pain.*

*He curls up in his bed.*

*He prays.*

O, sweet holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, help me. Help me.

*End of part five.*

### **Sixth Bowl: Foolish wisdom of flesh and false miracles**

*Fillide enters as St. Catherine. She poses in front of the torture wheel. She stares the audience down.*

*Merisi enters bloodied, his clothes cut through, his face partially slashed. Through out the scene Fillide remains St. Catherine in her pose in front of the wheel with the sword.*

MERISI

Bolt the door.

*Merisi throws off his bloody shirt. Fillide stands very still watching him.*

Cecco? Where are you? Where is he? God damn him, why isn't he here when I need him most?

*Merisi bolts the door.*

SAINT CATHERINE

What's happened?

MERISI

Be silent. Silent. Make no sound. I will not be questioned. Not now.

SAINT CATHERINE

Your face...

MERISI

DO NOT CHALLENGE ME. DO NOT...

*They hold still, a fearful tableaux.*

I murdered a man. Please, don't question me. Tomasino. It was him or me. Over tennis balls. Not a woman. Tennis balls. He said I owed him a debt for sleeping with a...saint. Please, sit.

SAINT CATHERINE

Michel...

MERISI

SIT. WHAT DO I DO NOW? KILL MYSELF OUT OF MISERY?

SAINT CATHERINE

His family is strong with the Pope.

MERISI

He insulted me in the streets. When I turned my cheek he flew at me.

SAINT CATHERINE

Michel...

MERISI

HE INSULTED THE HONOR OF OUR FRIENDSHIP. IN PUBLIC.

SAINT CATHERINE

Make up a story...tell the police it was in self-defense...

MERISI

DON'T SAY ANYTHING. SIT AND BE STILL OR I WILL GO MAD.

Please...

*Shouting is heard in the street.*

MERISI

They'll have to kill me, before I let them drag me through the streets...

SAINT CATHERINE

Go to Naples. The law here can't follow you there.

MERISI

Is his blood still on my face?

SAINT CATHERINE

The Colonna family will help you escape. Your friends can petition for you...pardons are bought every day...go...all is not lost...

MERISI

The Tomasino family will insist I'm hanged. He went after a girl. I saw him in the streets. And right there in front of me, he ripped open a girl's dress and tried to sign his name on her breasts. She threw dirt in his face. He knocked her to the ground. I went wild. He laughed and spit at me. I took out my sword and shoved it up his ribs. I gutted the pig.

SAINT CATHERINE

You have one hour to leave Rome before there is a bounty on your head.

MERISI

Cecco? How do I get word to my boy?

SAINT CATHERINE

There's no time. You must go now. You must climb out the back window.

MERISI

A coward? Run away?

SAINT CATHERINE

Cecco will understand. You must do what you must do. He can be sent after you. Others will seek your pardon.

MERISI

Rome will never pardon the sinner who runs.

SAINT CATHERINE

You're a farmer's son who gives in to his temper more than to those who he loves. You're a murderer and now you must run until we who love you get someone to buy you a pardon.

MERISI

I can't run. Saint Catherine held her ground...

SAINT CATHERINE

You will be rubbed out between finger and thumb if you're found in Rome in the next hour. Window. Go.

MERISI

Have I betrayed those I love?

SAINT CATHERINE

Go. God crushes those who don't obey. No more time. Give up, you've lost. Don't even pray. Run away.

MERISI

Judas held the lantern 'between finger and thumb when he betrayed his great love...

Fillide – what's happened to me?

SAINT CATHERINE

Write us from Naples.

*Merisi climbs out the window  
The studio walls fall away.*

*The Angel of darkness sings as Merisi's flight erases Rome.*

ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Sinners are slain  
Whores must be paid  
Cowards must run  
No one is saved  
Rome  
City of God  
No time to pray  
Bravos must bend  
Down on their knees  
God crushes those who won't obey

*Fillide is on the streets in Rome.  
Merisi is far away in Naples.  
Fillide opens a letter from Merisi.  
Fillide reads the letter as Merisi speaks:*

MERISI

Dear Sister of my Soul, One of the girls torn from God's arms, My Saint Catherine, My Love Impenetrable, My Unrepentant, Dark, Darkest, Virgin Soul –

I sold a painting in Naples today. An accomplishment without pride or joy. I still have not learnt how to pray. I'm a coward. You know I am. I'm afraid. What if my wrath is all I am? I have tried to pray: "Angels sent to save the man from Caravaggio, save me from the path I was on. Bring me back home. Let me beg to wash the feet of Magdalene. Humble me. Save me from all future martyrdoms.

*A hired man, who looks exactly like the Angel of Darkness, approaches Fillide.  
He slashes her face. She pulls out her knife and attacks him.  
He knocks her to the ground. He breaks her neck.  
He throws her body into the river Tiber.*

I had a friend named Fillide. They found her battered bloated body in the river Tiber. A drowned whore for whom no one shed a tear. She deserved worse, the gossips said. The sinners among us are never satisfied.

I'll paint her as the Virgin Mother at the moment of Death, so that His Disciples and His followers will weep for her for all Eternity.

*Her body, bloated, washes up on the bank.*

*A man sets the body on a slab or a table.  
Cecco sits on a stool nearby and hides his head in silent grief.*

*Merisi poses the body for Death of a Virgin.*

*He studies the composition.*

*Merisi pours water into a basin.*

*He washes the corpse's feet.*

MERISI

When I die, will I ask to be raised from the dead? Give it another try? Who isn't afraid?

I remember watching a young girl from Rome whose spirit was stronger than that of any man who left home.

God so loved the world He gave to us His darkest sorrow.

I will not run.

*End of part six.*

### **Respite: a Pope's Pardon**

*Cecco sits in the imposing office of the Cardinal Difetti.  
He stares up at a painting by Guido Reni.*

CECCO

The colors make me want to vomit.

*Cardinal Difetti, who looks exactly like the Angel of Darkness, enters.  
Cecco stands.*

ANGEL as CARDINAL DIFETTI

Sit. Sit. It's not usual that we give audience to one so...

CECCO

I've taken confession. And I've bathed.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

You love your Master? Your devotion is touching. Michelangelo Merisi, what he might have been.

CECCO

Can be.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Why can't artist and whores learn to live as the best of us? Compromised. Repressed. Modest. Virtuous. Dignified. Rome was built and faught to remind us God crushes those who don't obey.

CECCO

I pray he can get a pardon and return to Rome. God has tested him, but now he has mended...his soul, and wants to return to serve...

CARDINAL DIFETTI

One of the Great. God called to Him. But he answered the call of lust, vanity. Do you agree?

CECCO

He's suffered for it. But he has seen the error of...

CARDINA: DIFETTI

Yes, yes, yes, the error of his ways. Rah bis boom hurray. The jackass, he had to go too far, didn't he? Raging through the streets like a jackass with bardassi. Is that how one reaches a state of revelation about life's mysteries? Braggarts aren't master painters, they're cartoons. Do you agree?

CECCO

If he is allowed to return, to be embraced by men of God once again, he can be what God has called him to be, one of Rome's Great. We who love him, who love God, will do anything to help him achieve his rightful place at the foot of God's throne again.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Who taught you to talk this way?

CECCO

Michelangelo Merisi.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

He's a man who can't be tamed. Eh? Do you agree? Or do you think you can tame him? A little more taming would have done him good, so that his good could then serve our Father, who blessed him through his art. So that he could give us a masterpiece. But that would require the impossible. Do you think it's possible?

CECCO

If God wishes it so.

CARDINAL DIFETTO

Does he wish it so? Does he wish to be?

CECCO

Be tamed?

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Humbled before God.

*Cecco refrains from answering.*

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Once humbled, he could be forgiven anything.

CECCO

I'm too ignorant to say...

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Do you forgive him?

CECCO

Me? I'm not important. I serve.



CARDINAL DIFETTI

Do you understand good art from bad?

CECCO

Do you?

CARDINAL DIFETTI

All art is bad in its own way.

CECCO

I'm too uneducated to talk about art...

CARDINAL DIFETTI

You have street smarts, don't you? And you've been taught by the best, haven't you? That's why everyone insists he must be pardoned, even though he killed a man? He's a real artist and that's God given, they say. Tell me, does he paint the way he eats, drinks, fights, fucks?

CECCO

He paints with the most beautiful restraint.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

How did you put up with it? His insults? His insolence? His needs? Or is that what melted you to him?

CECCO

My friends warned me about him. "He'll bite you. Pull your pants down. He's a fucking Bravo. Lives on insults. Blind threats. Arrogance. Fat full kisses and salty violence."

CARDINAL DIFETTI

You lived with him, yes?

CECCO

I would watch him as he slept. He slept deeply, but never easily. I would watch his forehead become a field of angry thoughts as his hands closed in fists. I'd massage his temples as he slept, soothe his eyelids with my breath, then rest my head on his chest. In the morning, he'd ask me, Do you want to be my apprentice, you filthy pickpocket? You can live in the studio instead of the street. You can model for me for bread." "Will you teach me" I asked. "Be my Master." "You don't know what you're asking," he told me. I asked, "Who's your Master?" He laughed. "I have one master, the model. The model is everything. You should never improve on nature when you paint. I let the model decide everything."

CARDINAL DIFETTI

The model.

CECCO

I've kept his studio ready for him.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Let's pray his best work is ahead of him.

CECCO

As long as he has breath, he believes it is.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Yes, the vain and the damned always believe the best is just ahead of them and so they continue in sin. It's quite easy for them.

CECCO

I'll do anything to win his pardon.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

That's a pity. It's already been decided.

*A silence. Cecco is devastated.*

CECCO

Please, I beg you...

*Cecco throws himself to the floor, abject.*

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Model.. Model, stand up. Have you no faith? God does his work in mysterious ways. It's been decided and decided in his favor.

CECCO

Mother of God!

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Yes, you can thank her. Or we who like to get our way on earth. The Colonna family agreed with you. Except they paid in gold and not on their knees.

CECCO

Merisi is pardoned? He' can come home?

CARDINAL DIFETTI

They have prevailed. The Papal pardon will be read out today.

*Cecco kisses the Cardinal's hands.*

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Such a show. And for who? A braggart. Whoremonger. Wastrel. Fugitive. Spoiled child. Pervert. A blister of a human being. Stunted with stubbornness and pain.

CECCO

Thank you. Thank you. They were wrong. You are kind! I'll soon have him home again.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

There is one unfortunate circumstance. His ship set sail without him from Naples.

CECCO

He'll be on the next one.

*The Cardinal seems to become more an Angel of Darkness than human.*

CARDINAL DIFETTI

He won't wait. He'll march up the Tuscan shore to head it off at the next port. He'll catch fever and die on the beach.

CECCO

Nothing will stop him. If I believed all the dire predictions, all the false reports and rumors, he's died a hundred times already. And then comes the news he's risen again and is painting the story Lazarus in Greece. He'll be back in his studio.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

He'll try to hike to the next port on foot. Determined. Insane. Those words mean the same thing to him. Living his passionate life. Malaria. All one and the same. It's a damn shame.

CECCO

The Pope has pardoned him. He's coming home. Thank you.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

He'll fall face down on the beach. A fisherwoman and her daughter will find him. Curled up and alone. No one to pray for him. No one to say amen. He'll die just as he lived. A wretch.

CECCO

I'll air out our room. Fluff the bed. Get everything ready for him.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

You can't hear me? Ah, the Thrones of Authority must be protecting you.

CECCO

My man will be in my arms again.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

They don't like it when I make prophecies.

CECCO

We'll be inside each other again!

CARDINAL DIFETTI

*Signor Boneri!* Please remember, I pitied you.

CECCO

I prayed for this day. You answered. Thank you. We don't need to be pitied anymore.

CARDINAL DIFETTI

I'm but a vessel. The heavenly powers have answered your prayers.

CECCO

Thank you.

*He kisses the Cardinal's hands and exits.*

CARDINAL DIFETTI

Pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death.

*End of the respite.*

## Seventh bowl: Wrathful wisdom

MERISI

Did you hear me, Cecco?

Bring me a cup of water.

Cecco, you prankster. Where'd you go? I must not sit down.

Cecco, prankster, pickpocket, John the Baptist...

Cecco, prankster, pickpocket, paintgrinder, Baptist, sweet St. Sebastian. Cecco.

A cup of water. Don't sit down.

I remember the first time I hissed at you in the streets. Brought you home to my studio. You put on Cupid's wings and made me promise you I'd be good. In the morning, you made coffee without saying a word. I loved how you looked at me.

Even though I knew you could never love me as much as you should. As much as I would need you to. I told myself, this young man, he'll help me become more than good. Fat full lips. Arrogance. Insults. Salty violence. I loved you. Without hope. Without fear. Did I ever tell you that?

Did I...?

The sun. I have to sit down...do not sit down...

I don't want to die a wretch.

Dear God, do not let me die in the sun. I'm to receive a pardon from the Pope. Rome calls me home. Home, Cecco. Where I can sleep on my straw mattress in my closed dark studio.

Fillide will come to embrace me with garlands and garlic. Sit for me, Fillide. Cover your legs, you whore. I bravadoed my patron today, I can pay you. Buy us a few bottles of red. Friends, do you miss me? How you must suffer there in Rome, no man from Caravaggio to ravish you. No Merisi to teach you restraint when you most need it, when you most want to bite a lip and run your fingers up the devil's dress to her most private parts. Do it. She'll forgive you everything.

They tried to stop me when I told them I was determined to march up the shoreline. The malarial coast will eat you up, they said. But I would not be stopped. Not me. Don't they understand? I'm to be pardoned in Rome today. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, back in the City of Men. The City of Punishment. Rapture. God.

MERISI

This light bouncing off the sand will make me go blind. Blind. Mad. Mad with white light. My piss is as bright as the sun.

*Merisi pisses in the sand. It burns him as he pisses. He writes words in the sand with his stream of piss.*

*A mirage walks towards Merisi. It is an Angel of Light, that resembles the Angel of Darkness, only its opposite.*

ANGEL OF LIGHT

You have malaria. Get out of the sun.

MERISI

Do you have any water you can give me, little girl?

ANGEL OF LIGHT

Why are you walking on the beach?

MERISI

My ship sailed...with my paintings on board... I'm an idiot. I'm baking in the sun and gull-shit. I meant to be in Rome by now. My pardon from the Pope is to be announced today. In the streets.

*Gulls shriek.*

ANGEL OF LIGHT

Cardinal Manstrione commissioned Guido Reni for the altar at St. Peter's today.

MERISI

Anyone but him. Anyone but that fraud. Goddamn it, my pardon comes a day too late to stop that obscenity. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter.

*(He sings a made-up ditty, to keep himself going:)*

Guido

Guido Guido Guido

Guido Guido

Reni

Beautiful blue eyes

Sweet chiseled nose

Rosy cheeks. Delicate limbs. Soft silky skin. How pretty. How pretty it is to be loved by God. By God and Guido Reni.

IT MAKES ME SICK.

*Gulls shriek.*

MERISI  
NO. I SAY NO TO GUIDO RENI. NO TO PARADISE.

*The Angel of Light disappears.*

I'LL KILL HIM AT MIDNIGHT DEATH TO ALL WHO PRAISE THE FAKE, ON  
THOSE WHO SHINE FALSE LIGHT WHO COO AND CLAP FOR SECOND  
RATE DELIGHTS WHO IDEALIZE TAKE FRIGHT I'LL BREAK YOUR SKULL  
AT MIDNIGHT. KA KA KA!

*Merisi chases imaginary gulls, shrieking and laughing.*

*Fillide enters. She too is a specter.*

FILLIDE  
Who's making all that noise? Call the police.

MERISI  
(chasing gulls) HA. KA KA KA! ROMA.

*Merisi sees Fillide.*

You're dead. Drowned in the river.

FILLIDE  
Yes. They'll never forgive you for painting me as the Virgin Mary. What were you thinking?

MERISI  
Don't reprimand me. Not you too.

*Gulls shriek.*

FILLIDE  
Why did you paint me that way?

MERISI  
I did what I had to do. Without fear.

FILLIDE  
And they will never forgive you.

MERISI  
I am to be pardoned in Roma today. ME. MERISI. A FREE MAN AGAIN. But I seem to have done something impulsive...wrong...look where I am...alone...my paintings on a boat that sailed without me...

FILLIDE

Shhh.

*Fillide wipes the sweat off Merisi's brow.*

MERISI

I'm a Knight of Malta. I do not die a wretch...

FILLIDE

You're ready then? Ready?

MERISI

Am I ready? Never and always. Ha. For what?

FILLIDE

To let Love look you in the eye.

MERISI

Why must women always bring it back to love? I'm a man.

FILLIDE

Without hope. Without fear.

MERISI

Cecco's waiting for me. Yes. I'll sleep again on my cool bed in the middle of the room with that pitstain of love, Dan Cupid. When we wake we'll debate the color of the light. If I sleep in too late, he'll pluck all the new white hairs from my chest.

*Merisi stops walking.*

I need to sit down.

Fillide, I want to confess. Will you hear my confession? I love Cecco more than God will ever know. More than my own Death...

FILLIDE

What are you doing here all alone?

MERISI

I don't know...

FILLIDE

God pity you.

*Fillide exits.*



*Merisi stares at the sea.*

MERISI

I was a stranger and you welcomed me  
I was naked and you clothed me  
I was thirsty and you gave me to drink  
I was hungry and you gave me food  
I was in prison and you came to me  
I was sick and you visited me

Cecco.  
Why did you suffer me?

I was dead.

I was dead...?

And you wept for me.

Cecco.

*The Angel of Light appears.*

MERISI

Who are you? You're not...

ANGEL OF LIGHT

I hold Dominion over all that is Right.

MERISI

I hold Dominion over all my mistakes. God is painted in my image and I'm a mistake!

*The Angel of Light disappears or turns to salt.*

That's right. I'll bring to light to God's mistakes. That's more to my taste. Warts. Blemishes. A worn face. The lines of age. The truth of lived flesh.

*The Angel of Correction appears. This Angel looks exactly like the other two, but smiles differently.*

And who are you? The last one I spoke to turned to salt.

ANGEL OF CORRECTION

I am the Angel of Correction.

MERISI

You're a critic?

ANGEL OF CORRECTION

The one who loves you most of all. Stand up.

MERISI

Give me your criticism. I want to improve.

ANGEL OF CORRECTION

Stand up.

*He stands.*

ANGEL OF CORRECTION

Cecco Boneri is in your studio. He's waiting for you.

MERISI

Go to hell. You're a demon, playing on my heart's fantasies.

ANGEL OF CORRECTION

I am an Angel of Correction.

MERISI

Fuck you. Where's my real Angel? The Angel of Sorrow.

ANGEL OF CORRECTION

We are all raised in the kingdom of God's wrath. Grief is not in our domain.

MERISI

Go away.

ANGEL OF CORRECTION

I will grant you this last wish.

*The Angel exits.*

MERISI

No. That's not my last wish. My last wish...NO.

*Merisi holds onto his knees. He may faint. He fights it off.*

I won't tell you my last wish. Where is he? Where's my Angel of Sorrow?

*Cecco enters.*

MERISI

Cecco. I must look terrible. O, look at you. I so want to look at you. Be still. Please. Let me look at you as I used to. In the darkness of my studio, where we knew God's love. Without hope. Without fear. Will you give me your arm?

*Cecco gives him an arm to lean on. Merisi stumbles.  
They sit down.*

Cecco, will you hold me?

*Cecco holds him in his arms.*

I loved when we laughed. We laughed at nothing all the time.

*Cecco kisses him.  
Merisi closes his eyes as it touched by God's grace. He dies.*

*We listen to the sea.*

*End of play.*