

INT. CHURCH OF SS. ANNUNZIATA--DAY

A dark, cool, ancient place. The sun from outside barely filters in through stained or dirty glass high above. But it isn't quiet: FAMILIES bustle through, WOMEN chat, OLD FOLKS pray noisily at the various altars to saints and martyrs.

Giovanni finds his friends spying on one alcove, where YOUNG AND MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN light candles and kneel before an archaic painting:

THE ANGEL GABRIEL'S ANNUNCIATION TO THE VIRGIN, who sits richly crowned, as a single white dove floats down on golden beams of light, symbolizing the immaculate conception.

The women are all in simple brown dresses, and have rings on their fingers: all married, of the lower classes. One ugly, FAT WOMAN prays out loud.

FAT WOMAN

Please, sweet Madonna, help me have another child, a boy this time, or my husband won't ever talk to me again!

Carlo whispers to the others.

CARLO

Talk to her? I can't believe he fucks her.

GIANNI

Maybe that's her problem. No wonder half the men in Florence are queer, if that's what marriage offers.

PIERO

Don't you read? According to our beloved new Saint Bernardino, it's because you damned Medici have been corrupting our manhood, cementing your sinful transactions with sodomy...

CARLO

So that's what father meant when he said you screwed him on his last loan!

GIANNI

Yeah, and then he moved his bowels and you were born.

They all laugh raucously, shoving each other around and nearly knocking over a marble fount for holy water.

A thin, pretty HOUSEWIFE, on her knees lighting a candle, scowls at them.

HOUSEWIFE

Show some respect! We're praying to the Virgin here!

PIERO

The Virgin? To get pregnant? Come kneel over here and light my candle, you'll have better luck!

Gianni thrusts his hips out.

GIANNI

Yeah, lady! I'm not particular. If your husband's little sparrow isn't up to the job, I've got a nice big bird right here that'll hatch you some chicks! It's not the holy dove, but you're no virgin, either!

HOUSEWIFE

Shame on you all! You'll rot in hell!

The boys laugh and make obscene gestures. All except for Giovanni, who stands spellbound:

At the back of the alcove, away from the other wives, sits LUSANNA.

At thirty, Lusanna is still the most beautiful woman in Florence. Perhaps in all of Italy. She wears the simple brown dress of the lower classes, but a fine silk scarf accents her beauty.

Her eyes are down, unaware or ignoring the raucous youths. In the soft light, she looks like a living angel.

GIOVANNI

Sweet mother of God...

CARLO

Not you too, Giovanni, you sound like one of them! Giovanni?

Giovanni doesn't hear him. Lusanna looks up, holding his eyes for a moment. Color flushes her cheeks.

Giovanni's friends follow his gaze, and WHISTLE lustily.

GIANNI

There's a face that could launch a thousand ships, eh? Raises my mast, that's for sure.

The spell broken, Lusanna looks down, finishing her prayer. But Giovanni is unable to look away, or even breathe.

GIANNI (CONT'D)

Uh-oh. Looks like he's been hit by the thunderbolt.

CARLO

Cupid's blind little arrow...

He points a finger straight out from his crotch and pokes Giovanni in the butt. Giovanni swats it away.

GIOVANNI

Who is she?

CARLO

I don't know. I've seen her around. Real proud bitch, looks you right in the eye when she passes.

PIERO

I know...she's married to that old linen-maker, Andrea...Andrea Nucci? Has a shop on the Via San Gallo.

GIANNI

Ugh! That wrinkled old fart? No wonder she's not pregnant. She should be praying to Lazarus, to help her raise the dead.

CARLO

And a piece of ass like that warming his bed-- what a waste!

The boys groan and guffaw. Lusanna silences them with an unnerving, direct stare, all the more startling for the soft beauty of her face. Then she crosses herself and leaves. Giovanni shoves Carlo aside and takes off after her.

PIERO

Go for it, Giovanni! You can't do any worse than her old man!

GIOVANNI hurries through the church, looking around for Lusanna. He finally sees her going out through a side door.

She looks back at him over her shoulder, her face briefly lit by the sun. Then she turns away and exits.

GIOVANNI

Wait!

EXT. CHURCH OF SS. ANNUNZIATA--DAY

Giovanni rushes out, looks both ways before he spots Lusanna fifty yards down the street, heading into a street market.

EXT. STREET MARKET--DAY

The market is a riot of color and noise. Everything from fish to dye-colored canaries is on sale.

Giovanni follows Lusanna at a distance, ducking back into the shadows as she turns to examine a FRUIT-VENDOR's produce. She picks up a fig, takes a bite, and holds up five fingers to the vendor. He puts five more in her bag. She finishes the fig, licks her fingers and pays the man. She moves on.

Giovanni strains to see her as she wanders in and out of view. He loses her. He searches frantically, until he reaches the far end of the market.

Lusanna steps up behind him, from the shadow of an alleyway.

LUSANNA

Why are you following me?

He spins around. For a moment, all he can do is stare like a lost child into her huge, dark eyes.

LUSANNA (CONT'D)

Well?

He tries his best smile, but her direct gaze is unnerving.

GIOVANNI

I...I just wanted, I just wanted to--

LUSANNA

What? To torment me, like those other poor women?

GIOVANNI

No! I just wanted...to walk with you.

LUSANNA

Then why were you skulking behind me?

She smiles faintly. Giovanni recovers his composure and pours on the charm.

GIOVANNI

I wasn't! All right, I was. I couldn't help myself. You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, and I wanted to keep seeing you.

LUSANNA

Why thank you. A fine young fellow like you must have seen a great many beautiful women.

Lusanna demurely bows her head. Thinking he's won, he again flashes a smile, offers his arm.

GIOVANNI

May I walk with you now?

LUSANNA

Of course not. It wouldn't be proper. You're a stranger, you don't even know who I am.

GIOVANNI

No! I mean, yes...I know you're the wife of Andrea Nucci.

LUSANNA

Then obviously you know I'm married, and not suited for the attentions of a fancy young bachelor like Giovanni Della Casa. Have a good day.

GIOVANNI

Wait--you know who I am?

LUSANNA

Who doesn't? Tell me, Signore, does this approach really bring you success, you and your friends? Hunting girls around as if we were game, trying to snare us with false charm so you can take us home and skin us?

GIOVANNI

I'm not trying to...to skin you--

LUSANNA

And I'm not so young and stupid that I can't see what you're up to. Just because you're one of the city's golden boys doesn't mean I'm available for your pleasure, even if I am just the wife of a poor artisan. I'm sorry, but you're going home from this hunt without the trophy. Go find some other star-struck girl to light your candle, "you'll have better luck."

Now she flashes her best smile.

LUSANNA (CONT'D)

Here, have a fig.

Giovanni blushes to the roots of his hair as she hands him one, then leaves him there, speechless.

LUSANNA turns the corner into a side-street. Looks back to make sure she's alone. And collapses against the wall, her hand clutched to her heart, her breath coming in rapid gasps.

LUSANNA (CONT'D)
Saints, protect me...

She squeezes her eyes, then gathers her wits and hurries off.

EXT. VIA SAN GALLO--DUSK

A narrow, cobbled street. The old buildings loom, closing off daylight. Above are living quarters. Below, wood doors open onto artisan shops: tailors, weavers, fabric merchants.

Lusanna makes her way past carts and pallets stacked with bolts of coarse linens and burlaps, to a gloomy little shop tucked under one of the many stone buttresses that keep the buildings from falling in against each other.

INT. ANDREA'S SHOP--DUSK

Lusanna enters. The failing daylight barely pierces the gloom, revealing heavy oak tables laid out with lengths of linen, measuring sticks and knives. Shelves on the walls hold more cloth samples and tools.

The shop-boy, PAOLO MAGALDI, fifteen, long, black hair, looks up disinterestedly from the cloth he's grooming.

LUSANNA
Where's Andrea?

PAOLO
Sick in bed. His stomach, again.

LUSANNA
Well, I bought his medicine. You may as well go on home, I'll close up.

He shrugs and leaves. Lusanna checks the moneybox, then follows.

EXT. ANDREA'S SHOP--DUSK

Lusanna locks the door with a crude key, then lets herself into another a few feet away. Stairs lead up into darkness.

INT. ANDREA'S BEDROOM--DUSK

A simple room, lit by a small window and a single beeswax taper. Lusanna enters, finding her husband ANDREA in bed.

Fifty years old, bald, his face is pale, creased with the pain of long illness. She puts a hand on his forehead.

LUSANNA

Poor thing. How are you feeling?

He sits up a little, holding his stomach.

ANDREA

The same.

She takes off her shawl and sits by his side. Taking a small vial from her dress, she pours a little white powder into a water cup on the nightstand and offers it to him.

LUSANNA

Here. Your medicine.

ANDREA

There's no point, it doesn't do anything for me.

LUSANNA

Well, it won't if you don't take it. Go on, drink.

Andrea takes it from her and swallows it with a grimace.

ANDREA

Son of a pig's whore! This stuff'll kill me before my stomach does.

Lusanna chuckles. Andrea manages a smile and a kiss.

LUSANNA

You see? You're feeling better already.

She takes off her dress and lies down close to him.

LUSANNA (CONT'D)

I prayed to the Virgin again today. And it's the right time of month...

ANDREA

Lusanna, I can't...I'm not well enough.

LUSANNA

You never are...is it so much to ask, for you to give me at least a child to love?

ANDREA

I'm sorry.

He turns away from her. Lusanna gets up, blows out the taper, and walks to the window. Outside, night has fallen.

Faint moonbeams enter, enough to light the tears in her eyes.