

# Michael Angelo

by

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# Michael Angelo

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## Dedication

Michel, piu che mortal, Angel divino. -- ARIOSTO.

Similamente operando all' artista  
ch' a l'abito dell' arte e man che trema.  
-- DANTE, Par. xiii., st. 77.

### DEDICATION.

Nothing that is shall perish utterly,  
But perish only to revive again  
In other forms, as clouds restore in rain  
The exhalations of the land and sea.  
Men build their houses from the masonry  
Of ruined tombs; the passion and the pain  
Of hearts, that long have ceased to beat, remain  
To throb in hearts that are, or are to be.  
So from old chronicles, where sleep in dust  
Names that once filled the world with trumpet tones,  
I build this verse; and flowers of song have thrust  
Their roots among the loose disjointed stones,  
Which to this end I fashion as I must.  
Quickened are they that touch the Prophet's bones.

## Part First

I.

### PROLOGUE AT ISCHIA

The Castle Terrace. VITTORIA COLONNA, and JULIA GONZAGA.

VITTORIA.

Will you then leave me, Julia, and so soon,  
To pace alone this terrace like a ghost?

JULIA.

To-morrow, dearest.

VITTORIA.

Do not say to-morrow.

A whole month of to-morrows were too soon.  
You must not go. You are a part of me.

JULIA.

I must return to Fondi.

VITTORIA.

The old castle

Needs not your presence. No one waits for you.  
Stay one day longer with me. They who go  
Feel not the pain of parting; it is they  
Who stay behind that suffer. I was thinking  
But yesterday how like and how unlike  
Have been, and are, our destinies. Your husband,  
The good Vespasian, an old man, who seemed  
A father to you rather than a husband,  
Died in your arms; but mine, in all the flower  
And promise of his youth, was taken from me  
As by a rushing wind. The breath of battle  
Breathed on him, and I saw his face no more,  
Save as in dreams it haunts me. As our love  
Was for these men, so is our sorrow for them.  
Yours a child's sorrow, smiling through its tears;  
But mine the grief of an impassioned woman,  
Who drank her life up in one draught of love.

JULIA.

Behold this locket. This is the white hair  
Of my Vespasian. This is the flower-of-love,  
This amaranth, and beneath it the device  
Non moritura. Thus my heart remains  
True to his memory; and the ancient castle,  
Where we have lived together, where he died,  
Is dear to me as Ischia is to you.

VITTORIA.

I did not mean to chide you.

JULIA.

                    Let your heart  
Find, if it can, some poor apology  
For one who is too young, and feels too keenly  
The joy of life, to give up all her days  
To sorrow for the dead. While I am true  
To the remembrance of the man I loved  
And mourn for still, I do not make a show  
Of all the grief I feel, nor live secluded  
And, like Veronica da Gambara,  
Drape my whole house in mourning, and drive forth  
In coach of sable drawn by sable horses,  
As if I were a corpse. Ah, one to-day  
Is worth for me a thousand yesterdays.

VITTORIA.

Dear Julia! Friendship has its jealousies  
As well as love. Who waits for you at Fondi?

JULIA.

A friend of mine and yours; a friend and friar.  
You have at Naples your Fra Bernadino;  
And I at Fondi have my Fra Bastiano,  
The famous artist, who has come from Rome  
To paint my portrait. That is not a sin.

VITTORIA.

Only a vanity.

JULIA.

                    He painted yours.

VITTORIA.

Do not call up to me those days departed

When I was young, and all was bright about me,  
And the vicissitudes of life were things  
But to be read of in old histories,  
Though as pertaining unto me or mine  
Impossible. Ah, then I dreamed your dreams,  
And now, grown older, I look back and see  
They were illusions.

JULIA.

Yet without illusions  
What would our lives become, what we ourselves?  
Dreams or illusions, call them what you will,  
They lift us from the commonplace of life  
To better things.

VITTORIA.

Are there no brighter dreams,  
No higher aspirations, than the wish  
To please and to be pleased?

JULIA.

For you there are;  
I am no saint; I feel the world we live in  
Comes before that which is to be here after,  
And must be dealt with first.

VITTORIA.

But in what way?

JULIA.

Let the soft wind that wafts to us the odor  
Of orange blossoms, let the laughing sea  
And the bright sunshine bathing all the world,  
Answer the question.

VITTORIA.

And for whom is meant  
This portrait that you speak of?

JULIA.

For my friend  
The Cardinal Ippolito.

VITTORIA.

For him?

JULIA

Yes, for Ippolito the Magnificent.  
'T is always flattering to a woman's pride  
To be admired by one whom all admire.

VITTORIA.

Ah, Julia, she that makes herself a dove  
Is eaten by the hawk. Be on your guard,  
He is a Cardinal; and his adoration  
Should be elsewhere directed.

JULIA.

You forget

The horror of that night, when Barbarossa,  
The Moorish corsair, landed on our coast  
To seize me for the Sultan Soliman;  
How in the dead of night, when all were sleeping,  
He scaled the castle wall; how I escaped,  
And in my night-dress, mounting a swift steed,  
Fled to the mountains, and took refuge there  
Among the brigands. Then of all my friends  
The Cardinal Ippolito was first  
To come with his retainers to my rescue.  
Could I refuse the only boon he asked  
At such a time, my portrait?

VITTORIA.

I have heard

Strange stories of the splendors of his palace,  
And how, apparelled like a Spanish Prince,  
He rides through Rome with a long retinue  
Of Ethiopians and Numidians  
And Turks and Tartars, in fantastic dresses,  
Making a gallant show. Is this the way  
A Cardinal should live?

JULIA.

He is so young;

Hardly of age, or little more than that;  
Beautiful, generous, fond of arts and letters,  
A poet, a musician, and a scholar;  
Master of many languages, and a player  
On many instruments. In Rome, his palace  
Is the asylum of all men distinguished  
In art or science, and all Florentines

Escaping from the tyranny of his cousin,  
Duke Alessandro.

VITTORIA.

I have seen his portrait,  
Painted by Titian. You have painted it  
In brighter colors.

JULIA.

And my Cardinal,  
At Itri, in the courtyard of his palace,  
Keeps a tame lion!

VITTORIA.

And so counterfeits  
St. Mark, the Evangelist!

JULIA.

Ah, your tame lion  
Is Michael Angelo.

VITTORIA.

You speak a name  
That always thrills me with a noble sound,  
As of a trumpet! Michael Angelo!  
A lion all men fear and none can tame;  
A man that all men honor, and the model  
That all should follow; one who works and prays,  
For work is prayer, and consecrates his life  
To the sublime ideal of his art,  
Till art and life are one; a man who holds  
Such place in all men's thoughts, that when they speak  
Of great things done, or to be done, his name  
Is ever on their lips.

JULIA.

You too can paint  
The portrait of your hero, and in colors  
Brighter than Titian's; I might warn you also  
Against the dangers that beset your path;  
But I forbear.

VITTORIA.

If I were made of marble,  
Of Fior di Persico or Pavonazzo,  
He might admire me: being but flesh and blood,



I am no more to him than other women;  
That is, am nothing.

JULIA.

Does he ride through Rome  
Upon his little mule, as he was wont,  
With his slouched hat, and boots of Cordovan,  
As when I saw him last?

VITTORIA.

Pray do not jest.  
I cannot couple with his noble name  
A trivial word! Look, how the setting sun  
Lights up Castel-a-mare and Sorrento,  
And changes Capri to a purple cloud!  
And there Vesuvius with its plume of smoke,  
And the great city stretched upon the shore  
As in a dream!

JULIA.

Parthenope the Siren!

VITTORIA.

And yon long line of lights, those sunlit windows  
Blaze like the torches carried in procession  
To do her honor! It is beautiful!

JULIA.

I have no heart to feel the beauty of it!  
My feet are weary, pacing up and down  
These level flags, and wearier still my thoughts  
Treading the broken pavement of the Past,  
It is too sad. I will go in and rest,  
And make me ready for to-morrow's journey.

VITTORIA.

I will go with you; for I would not lose  
One hour of your dear presence. 'T is enough  
Only to be in the same room with you.  
I need not speak to you, nor hear you speak;  
If I but see you, I am satisfied.

[They go in.]

MONOLOGUE: THE LAST JUDGMENT

MICHAEL ANGELO's Studio. He is at work on the cartoon of the Last Judgment.

MICHAEL ANGELO.

Why did the Pope and his ten Cardinals  
Come here to lay this heavy task upon me?  
Were not the paintings on the Sistine ceiling  
Enough for them? They saw the Hebrew leader  
Waiting, and clutching his tempestuous beard,  
But heeded not. The bones of Julius  
Shook in their sepulchre. I heard the sound;  
They only heard the sound of their own voices.

Are there no other artists here in Rome  
To do this work, that they must needs seek me?  
Fra Bastian, my Era Bastian, might have done it;  
But he is lost to art. The Papal Seals,  
Like leaden weights upon a dead man's eyes,  
Press down his lids; and so the burden falls  
On Michael Angelo, Chief Architect  
And Painter of the Apostolic Palace.  
That is the title they cajole me with,  
To make me do their work and leave my own;  
But having once begun, I turn not back.  
Blow, ye bright angels, on your golden trumpets  
To the four corners of the earth, and wake  
The dead to judgment! Ye recording angels,  
Open your books and read? Ye dead awake!  
Rise from your graves, drowsy and drugged with death,  
As men who suddenly aroused from sleep  
Look round amazed, and know not where they are!

In happy hours, when the imagination  
Wakes like a wind at midnight, and the soul  
Trembles in all its leaves, it is a joy  
To be uplifted on its wings, and listen  
To the prophetic voices in the air  
That call us onward. Then the work we do  
Is a delight, and the obedient hand  
Never grows weary. But how different is it  
En the disconsolate, discouraged hours,  
When all the wisdom of the world appears  
As trivial as the gossip of a nurse  
In a sick-room, and all our work seems useless,

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