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An offer that can't be refused

by Nick Barrett

It was love at first sight. Colpo di fulmine - the thunderbolt as they say in Italian; it had struck him as soon as he walked into this space, not just another 500 square metre site but one with a special, almost palpable, magic.

This project would make his name if it went well. But if it wasn't delivered on time, on budget and, most important of all, to the quality this most demanding of Clients expected, he faced ruin.

This wasn't a Client who could be refused. Take the job and maybe end up poverty stricken or worse; refuse it and it's the same. Fail and face disaster; but to succeed, what an achievement that would be! He feared to accept it; he daren't refuse it.

He had made it worse for himself. It was just a painting job, not even using skills he rated highly, but a rival had put his name forward for the contract, he knew, because he knew that the chances of failure were high. Foolishly, in anger, he responded by suggesting an even more complex scheme to impress the Client. Could he deliver it though? Concerns evaporated as he fell more in love with this place.

Here comes the Client now, the Genoese, a bearded man with a fearsome reputation, a famously violent temper, a rough and coarse manner to match. Dead bodies littered his 70 year old story. Flanked by men who would do his bidding instantly. No appeal to any laws - this Client was the law.

"You are sure you can do this?" the Client came right to the point.

"I am," was all he could think to respond.

“Draw me a perfect circle with that,” the Client nodded towards a three foot long blue-chalk tipped setting-out stick.

He drew a one foot radius circle on the floor, perfectly, by sight. One of the flunkys stepped forward to inspect, gave the Client a nod of approval and stepped back.

“Perfect. You should sign it,” the Client said, toying with his servant.

He wrote his name on the floor with the chalk stick, twelve letters in an intricate script never seen before, of a beauty none of the entourage had imagined existed. Taking on a pulsating luminosity, the air around it shimmering, the blue signature appeared to rise towards their eyes, burning itself onto their retinas, passing into their hearts where its mark would lie forever, and moving on to rest in some corner of even the blackest of their souls.

“The contract is yours,” the Client eventually said, breaking the spell, turning away with entourage following. He turned his head back, a last glance at the signature.

“Michelangelo, isn’t it time you were up that ladder?” he ordered, “my chapel ceiling had better not be late. Consider starting with Adam.”

Whose failure got him thrown out of the garden - a warning not lost on Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni. “Thank you Holy Father, I’ll do as you suggest,” he lied.