

# Tempera or Tempest?

Already close to fifty, a phenomenal age compared to his fellow citizens, Francesco Maria Del Monte shuffles towards the end of the dungeon tunnel. He has trouble walking but his eyes are as sharp as ever, as sharp as the first time he laid eyes on *The Cardsharps*. A painting unlike any seen before in Italy and which to Francesco truly symbolizes the Renaissance. Life has not been easy for the aging patron of the arts ever since he acquired both the painting and the artist some years before. More and more the sponsor and hopeful Pope finds he can't control his young pupil. Then again would he want to, because the more tempers flare the more majestic and expressive the paintings become. This time however Francesco came too late and could not prevent disastrous calamity.

It takes Francesco ages to reach the cell at the farthest end of the dungeon and when he finally reaches the stone bench, permanently placed in front of the thick metal bars, he nearly collapses before he can reach a hand towards the marble slab to steady himself. His arrival isn't noticed. Not unlike a caged lion thick with madness after roaming the same restricted space for so many years so is the person inside the crossed bars pacing back and forth with eyes wide and mouth muttering unintelligible words without making a single sound.

"Caro!" Francesco shouts as he swings his legs around the stone bench to face dungeon cell. For a while the old man stares and follows the restless figure in front of him trying to make out if the young man is talking about something or is merely lost in madness.

"Focus Caro, wake up!" he yells. No response.

Francesco shakes his head, casually takes out an orange from his magnificent cloak and starts peeling.

"I have another commission for you", Francesco begins, "at least I had one until this morning. By now the Condottieri have I'm sure been told of your deed and the rest of the story has been picked up by the scrupulous courtesans to whom I still owe money and favors. Mario thinks you're dead already and he might not be wrong for long. But all this is of course up to a higher power because my own ended when you killed that man. Who was he anyway? Did he claim you slept with his wife? or worse, did he insult your work? Tell me, what was it?"

Complete silence.

The man behind bars, wearing an expensive but dirty evening garment, continually runs his hand through his thick black hair but never looks up from his imaginary and completely soundless discussion and ignores Francesco.

"Look, quite frankly I don't care what you did. You killed a man? Fine, I'm sure you had your reasons. Will this end your career? Maybe, but most likely not. I might never become Pope but I still have some

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powerful friends and we can get you out of here and out of this situation. I knew the moment I heard the news that you might still go on painting somewhere, but never more for me."

Francesco briefly halts to stuff two slices of orange in his mouth. For a moment he considers tossing the remaining halves into the cage but they would go unnoticed he imagines.

"So there, what's to be gained from this visit you might wonder? I want to know how you are possible my young friend. How can there be one such as you? Leonardo did not go around killing people, although he did have a hand in many deaths, but that's beside the point right now. What I mean is that Titian, your grand teacher, behaved himself. God rest his soul, how he would rise from the grave if he knew of your transgressions. Caro, how is it that someone like yourself who can't even hold his drinking cup steady can paint a vase of flowers in such detail it can't be distinguished from the original? How? Tell me how? How come a person such as yourself who hacks and slashes the first man who contradicts him can find the patience to pick up a brush and for hours work on painting a single ring? I've seen you work Caro, you're a different person. You're not this, this thing in front of me. Who is that person Caro? Tell me? Who are these two creatures?"

Francesco Maria Del Monte would leave the prison without his answer. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, the man behind bars, would also leave the prison but would never completely recover. He would paint many more masterpieces but never for Francesco. Francesco would live to a very old age indeed for those times and as he passed the age of 80 he still actively supported the arts and artists directly, but he would never figure out the mystery that was Caravaggio.

Caravaggio wasn't and isn't the only example of this strange duality between focus and calmness, utter rage and despair. Many filmmakers who have portrayed Rembrandt believe the great artist also had similar shifts. Rembrandt's career ended with a painting that could easily be described as the first incarnation of abstract modern art. It is a rough draft using broad strokes and blotches of paint, not the kind of work Rembrandt was also capable of, not the refined and incredibly detailed work in some of his earlier paintings.

We will likely never know what possessed Caravaggio or what the man was really like when he was painting but the mystery remains and is a compelling one and asks the basic question: what temperaments are needed for great genius and how can two such completely different people inhabit the same mind and still create such wonders of art?