

Brother Francis

By

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FADE IN:

BLACK SCREEN:

SUPER:

"If I've omitted or altered many of Francis' deeds and added others, it's not from ignorance or irreverence, but to match his life with his myth.

The dutiful man, who by ceaseless struggle succeeds in fulfilling a purpose higher than morality, truth or beauty. The obligation to convert the body God entrusted to us and turn it into spirit."

-- Nikos Kazantzakis

EXT. ITALIAN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

SUPER: "Italian countryside - 13th Century"

EXT. MONASTERY - DAY

A Spring morning bursting with life. A vibrant green garden, flowers, and a fountain. Birds sing. From the Monastery chapel the melody of Gregorian Chant.

The prayer ends and the bells ring. The chapel doors open and monks, in brown habits, file out in almost Marine marching step. They wear sandals and coarse brown socks.

SUPER: "Basilica and Sacro Convento, Assisi - 1260 AD"

One set of barefoot and dirty feet wander on the path. LEO is an older figure. A thin wrinkled face, short beard, with gray hair. His robe is worn and threadbare.

He reaches the fountain, takes in the scenery.

LEO

What peace! What beauty! Brother
Sky!

As he speaks animals appear. A bird lands on his shoulder, a rabbit hops to his feet, and a small deer approaches.

He speaks tenderly to the animals, caresses them, and spreads his arms.

LEO
 Brother rabbit, sister fawn, how
 nice of you to visit.

Now in the classic pose of statues of Francis of Assisi:
 animal at his feet, a bird on his shoulder.

The sparrow hops back and forth, chirps noisily into his
 ear. His expression changes and becomes more somber. He
 tilts his head and speaks to the bird.

LEO
 Father Francis, is that
 you? Forgive my ears, they're
 still made of clay and fail to hear
 the spirit.

Tears form, fall, and water the cracks in his face.

LEO
 I miss you. I wore myself out
 searching for God. You showed me
 where he's found... the green leaf,
 the glass of cool water, a warm
 embrace.

He takes a deep breath and pauses.

LEO
 You saw my timid nature and lifted
 my spirit. Called me Brother Leo
 and I was your lion.

He casts a gaze back toward the well manicured monastery.

LEO
 Look at what we've become. Warm
 beds, fine robes and sandals.

MONTAGE - MONASTERY LIFE

-- Monks engaged in pleasant conversation, joking, laughing.

-- Chanting in a beautiful church, magnificent sculptures
 and artwork.

-- Sitting down to a wonderful meal in the refectory.

LEO (V.O.)
 Look at our wealth. Have we become
 blind, do we fail to see?

-- Outside the monastery wall, a cripple sits on the ground
 with a hand extended to passersby.

BACK TO SCENE

Leo blinks his eyes, shakes his head, the images disappear.
He sees the monastery.

LEO
Forgive me, but I feel we have
betrayed Lady Poverty.

He looks deep into the fountain. The water shimmers.

LEO
I remember... we were all
searching. You cleared our vision
and taught us how to see.

INT. SIMPLE COTTAGE - DAY

A much younger Leo, early twenties, pushes his chair back
from a table. The remains of a simple breakfast are
visible. The morning sun breaks through a window.

SUPER: "Village of Rivotorto - 65 years earlier"

He cleans up slowly. Fingers linger as he puts a dish
away. Moves a broom aimlessly as he looks out the window.

LEO
They'll be here soon. I must be
ready.

He picks up a mug and places it in a cupboard. There are two
dust covered mugs visible, one more petite than the
other. With reverence he places his next to them.

LEO
Mama, Papa, how I miss you.

He breathes deeply, his head falls.

LEO
I'm sorry. Never what you wanted,
but I've decided. Today.

His pace picks up. He throws some clothing in a sack, grabs
a small bag of coins and opens the door. He looks back in
the house, his eyes blink hard. He closes the door.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

A small country village. Leo stands in front of his cottage, staff and satchel in hand. A young HUSBAND and clearly pregnant WIFE stand before him.

HUSBAND

Leo, we don't know how to thank you.

WIFE

(looking at husband)

Yes, but I know we'll be very happy here.

Leo avoids eye contact with the couple, squirms with discomfort at their gratitude.

LEO

Well yes, yes... I'm sure you will. It was a good home to me.

HUSBAND

Her parents never approved of me, and then...

He looks at his wife, touches the bulge softly. Tears form in her eyes.

WIFE

We just had to go... leave... we didn't know where --

LEO

-- Now, now, don't worry. You're safe and you have a home.

Leo looks away down the road.

LEO

It... it really is getting late, I should be going.

He turns and slips away from the couple.

HUSBAND

(shouting after him)

Well, have a good trip. We hope you find the friend you're looking for! What's his name?

Leo waves back briefly.

LEO
 (almost inaudible)
 God.

The couple goes inside. Leo walks a short distance and sees an older woman, MARY, hurrying toward him. She is tall and aristocratic in bearing.

For a moment Leo looks around, seeks to turn away, but then just stops, lowers his head, and waits.

MARY
 Brother! I've come to stop you, to
 talk to you one more time.

Leo's head stays down as he speaks.

LEO
 No bother, no need. It's
 done. Finished.

Mary grabs his shoulders, jerks to pull his head up.

MARY
 You gave our home away. Shame on
 you! What would Mama and Papa say?

Leo doesn't answer. His head drops for a few moments. Then it comes up, bright eyes and firm chin. He looks directly at her as he removes her arms from his shoulders.

LEO
 That a house needs a family to be a
 home. You're married, live in your
 palazzo with your children.

He looks back toward the house.

LEO
 They'll be happy there and build a
 future.

He walks away. Initially shocked by his reaction, she gathers herself and shouts after him.

MARY
 Yes. . . And I guess you won't
 need it! Always the dreamer, never
 quite satisfied! A disgrace to our
 family!

His back to her, Leo does not respond. He winces as she calls him a disgrace. He keeps walking.

INT. HOME OF COUNT SCIFI - NIGHT

An upstairs bedroom, two girls, late teens, both dressed in nightgowns, stand next to an open veranda door.

CLARA, long blond hair, a gold crucifix around her neck and ANNA, slightly taller, have their backs against the wall.

SUPER: "City of Assisi - 9 years later"

The sound of a lute and a strong voice singing a love song in French can be heard.

ANNA

I don't care what you say. I still think Sabatino is a better singer.

Clara listens, closer to the open door, enraptured, with hands clasped together under her chin.

CLARA

Hush will you!

A long stemmed red rose falls through the door, lands near her feet. She picks it up and breathes deeply of the scent. A smile breaks from ear to ear.

She turns and moves toward the open door. Anna grabs her.

ANNA

Are you crazy! Mama finds out we'll both be locked in for a month!

Clara jerks her arm away, but doesn't move.

CLARA

Leave me alone! I'm not a baby anymore! I want him to know --

Anna raises her finger to her lips and moves closer to Clara. Whispers in her ear.

ANNA

-- and he can know. Listen.

EXT. HOME OF COUNT SCIFI - NIGHT

A group of well dressed young men, early 20s. Two rest their lutes against the ground. SABATINO is the shorter, heavier build. FRANCIS is taller and more slender.

Sabatino slaps Francis on the back.

SABATINO

I did my best to accompany
you. But it seems your little bird
refuses to appear.

Francis smiles. They all share a good natured laugh at his expense. He takes his cap off, it has a striking plume. He looks up toward the veranda.

FRANCIS

Well...

Sabatino wags his head.

SABATINO

A shame to see such a beautiful
rose go to waste.

Francis claps his hands.

FRANCIS

All right gentleman, the night is
still young and I'm thirsty. Be
my guests! We'll eat and drink!

As the entire group moves away a golden retriever emerges from the shadows to follow. A once beautiful animal, he's older and limps as he tries to keep up. The dog barks.

Francis pauses, looks back, kneels down and waits.

FRANCIS

Fido, how true you are to your name
old boy. You've always been
faithful.

The dog reaches Francis. He cups his head with clear affection. The tail wags with joy.

FRANCIS

Yes, even when I ignored you.

FLASHBACK: FRANCIS AS A YOUNG BOY

A much younger Francis is playing fetch outside with a puppy. A woman's voice calls from inside.

WOMAN (O.S)

Francis, come in, time to eat now!

Little Francis is eager, runs toward the house, pauses to glance at an empty bowl near the door, and goes inside. He sits alone at the table.

The puppy runs to the empty bowl and stops, sniffs, looks toward the closed door.

WOMAN (O.S)
Did you feed Fido?

FRANCIS
Yes... he's all set.

MAN (O.S)
Son, what have I told you. Fido may not speak, but he feels. Love, joy, sorrow and hunger!

Francis grimaces as he listens.

FRANCIS
Yes, Papa.

MAN (O.S.)
Now go! Don't let it happen again!

Francis pushes away from the table.

BACK TO SCENE

Francis looks at his dog. Smiles.

FRANCIS
OK boy! If I wait for you to catch up all the wine will be gone. Tonight you get a ride!

Francis bends over and scoops the dog up and on to his shoulder. Francis walks away, Fido's head rests against his in joy. He licks his master's ear.

INT. BERNADONE CLOTHING SHOP - DAY

The magnificent fabric shop of SIR BERNADONE. He's a dynamo, powerful in build and personality. Francis is with him. A FEMALE SHOPPER is overwhelmed by Bernadone.

SIR BERNADONE
How much of this beautiful fabric would you like? Touch! Feel! How strong and heavy it is! How much would you like?

FEMALE SHOPPER
(hesitant)
Well, I don't know.

SIR BERNADONE

Come now, what more could you ask for? Just a few pieces of silver!

FEMALE SHOPPER

All right, okay, give me two yards.

SIR BERNADONE

Excellent Madam! Let my son Francis measure that out for you.

Francis takes the bolt to a table. His father holds up two fingers and winks at his son. Francis returns the wink. He measures out two yards, then backs up a foot and cuts.

The shop bell rings and an elderly WOMAN walks in slowly, poorly dressed. Bernadone ignores her. She approaches Francis from behind, taps his shoulder.

FRANCIS

(gruffly)

All right, all right! Wait a minute, can't you!

He turns and sees the old woman. His face softens.

FRANCIS

Yes Madam, how can I help you?

WOMAN

Simple material for a dress, my daughter's wedding. Not too much.

Francis glances at her and at various bolts of cloth. He displays some fine material to the woman. Bernadone, involved with another customer, peeks over, watches.

WOMAN

Well... well yes, this seems nice, but more than I can pay.

FRANCIS

(softly)

Ahh, you're in luck, discounted today at half price. Let me cut a couple of yards for you.

Francis spins and measures two yards. He then adds an extra yard, cuts, wraps it carefully, and hands it to her.

She reaches into a worn purse and pulls out four coins. Francis glances back, knows his father is watching. He puts the money in the till, checks again (his father is busy).

He embraces her wrinkled hand and slips several coins into her grasp. She looks up, surprised, ready to speak.

He motions for her to remain silent, gently closes her hands around the money.

FRANCIS

Madam, thank you for your purchase. Have a good day!

WOMAN

Bless you for your kindness.

The shop bell rings and a noble, MADAM SCIFI, enters with Clara. Madam looks down her nose as the old woman passes. Clara holds a red, long-stemmed rose.

SIR BERNADONE

Well, Madame Scifi, how nice to see you and Clara. What fine goods can I show you today?

MADAM SCIFI

(haughty demeanor)

Well, I'm not certain. Please show me what you have.

Bernadone bows, and shows her material.

Francis, busy putting away cloth, keeps an eye on young Clara. She sneaks peeks at him also, sniffs the rose. They move to the other side of the shop, away from their parents

FRANCIS

(whisper)

Will I see you later?

CLARA

(teasing)

Perhaps, perhaps my Francis.

They leave the shop. Francis sees the rose lying on the counter. He picks it up and absorbs the fragrance. Watches his Father work, sighs.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Francis and his friend GILES sit and have lunch in the square. Fido is parked under the table. Some nearby pigeons pick at leftovers, ignored.

GILES
 So... tonight? The usual, music,
 bar, a visit to Clara's? I think
 she likes you.

The TINKLING of a bell is heard softly in the background.

FRANCIS
 (distracted)
 Yes... sounds goods.

GILES
 We'll meet at Antonio's then?

The bell is louder. Francis turns his head looking for the source. Giles doesn't notice.

FRANCIS
 Huh?

Giles punches Francis on the side.

GILES
 Hello! Business concerns? Your
 father is very proud of you. Soon
 you'll be the owner!

Giles slaps him on the back.

FRANCIS
 Yes, my own business.

Francis downs the last of his sandwich. Breaks a little bread and throws it to the birds. The friends stand and walk away. Fido follows. The bell grows louder.

GILES
 Look out! Steer clear, don't you
 see the leper!

A warped man with advanced leprosy: can barely hold a walking stick, fingers are nubs, his nose an open cavity. The bell hangs from his neck. Francis looks disgusted.

They are interrupted as KNIGHTS ride into the square on horseback. The ladies admire them.

KNIGHT
 People of Assisi! Another dishonor
 to our city! The gutless Perugians
 burned some farm houses.

Francis and Giles are farther away, watching.

GILES

How dare they attack us!

There are yells from the crowd. Giles is excited, looks over at Francis who is mesmerized by the Knights.

GILES

You see, here it is. Clara's not enough? How about adventure?

FRANCIS

What? What are you talking about Giles?

GILES

Join the Knights! You know how to ride, not bad with a sword. Protect our City!

As they walk Francis is quiet, looks back at the Knights. Giles watches his friend and smiles with satisfaction.

EXT. CLOTHING SHOP - NIGHT

The end of the day, Francis and his father close the shop.

SIR BERNADONE

Listen son, you work hard... don't waste your pay. You know how hard it was for me. How humiliating it was to beg.

FRANCIS

I know, I know --

SIR BERNADONE

-- Earn money! Get rich! Buy a coat-of-arms. Only those who work hard, the rich and nobility deserve to live in the world.

FRANCIS

But you know what Mama says, be kind, generous, forgive.

SIR BERNADONE

Yes, yes, easy to say when you're born into wealth. Never hungry, scared of the next day.

He grabs Francis by both arms, looks at him closely.

SIR BERNADONE

Listen! If someone chips your
tooth, break his whole jaw. Don't
try to make people love you; make
them fear you!

There is a pause. Francis looks down, and then up at his
Father.

FRANCIS

Papa, I think I'm sure. Tomorrow
I'll join the Knights.

Bernadone is concerned, his eyes fall as his son speaks, but
then he looks up.

SIR BERNADONE

Son, I'm proud of you!

He smiles at his son, turns him and claps him on the back.

SIR BERNADONE

Go. Your friends are waiting.

EXT. ASSISI TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A huge crowd, Knights mounted on horseback. VERY LOUD
BACKGROUND.

MONTAGE - KNIGHTS ASSEMBLING

- Horse drawn wagons move supplies. Chaos.
- People cheer for their neighbors. Family members cry.
- Giles checks Francis over, pats him on the back.
- Bernardone watches his son with pride.
- Clara watches from a balcony, throws a rose.

BACK TO SCENE

Fido look for his master. Limp through the crowd. He sees
Francis and barks. Francis, busy with his horse, turns.

FRANCIS

Fido! Over here boy!

The dog's tail wags, he heads straight for him across a busy
street. A horse drawn wagon speeds past. Fido is struck by
one of the wheels, yelps and lays still.

Francis sprints over, fighting through the crowd. People gather as he kneels down. The background noise fades away.

FRANCIS

Fido, Fido, what happened to you?

MAN (V.O)

That wheel went right over him. He was crushed. Poor dog.

Fido whimpers, eyes open. Francis cups his head and pats softly. The tail moves once, but is then still. Fido's eyes close. Francis blinks his eyes hard. A tear can be seen.

Giles runs over, tries to move Francis on.

GILES

Don't worry, don't worry. Get ready! I'll take care of him. Take him to your parents for burial.

Francis stands and walks away. He looks back and the head of Fido is limp on Giles's shoulder. He shakes his head and walks to his horse. Works on securing his supplies.

He mounts and joins the procession. Smiles and waves to his family and friends. He turns away. His expression is solemn, bows his head, crosses himself, and rides away.

INT. CLARA HOME - DAY

A formal dining table. COUNT SCIFI is short, unremarkable in appearance. Anna is present with her rounded and jovial suitor, Sabatino.

MADAM SCIFI

Well, I've heard there is some preparation for battle going on.

Clara looks up, concerned, and stares at her father.

COUNT SCIFI

Yes, the Perugians are too bold.

He looks at Clara.

COUNT SCIFI

(more softly)

And Francis, the son of Bernardone, rides out also.

MADAM SCIFI
 (lectures)
 Really Clara. You shouldn't pine
 after the boy so... he's the son of
 a merchant, not nobility.

Clara is nervous as she answers her mother.

CLARA
 But he is brave. He could be
 Knighted when he returns.

MADAM SCIFI
 If he returns.

Clara looks back down at her plate.

ANNA
 Now Mama, don't say such things!

Sabatino is busy eating. Anna gives him a nudge to speak up.

SABATINO
 Yes, Madam Scifi, I know Francis,
 he's a good man.

Count Scifi looks at his wife.

COUNT SCIFI
 Enough, Bernadone married Pica,
 from a good family.

MADAM SCIFI
 Yes, a bit "wild" in her youth,
 lucky to have even him.

EXT. BATTLE GROUND - DAY

The battle is joined. Chaotic scenes of sword play, shouts,
 screams of pain, horses leap over bodies.

Francis, on horseback, bewildered, looks around with
 indecision. He sees someone butchered by a sword strike and
 closes his eyes.

When he peeks again someone else is assaulted. He squares
 his shoulders, pulls his sword, and rides to help.

SILENT - SLOW MOTION

An enemy knight charges him from behind. Strikes his
 helmet. Francis falls off his horse and collapses to the
 ground. Still.

DREAM - ASSISI NIGHT

The city, past midnight, no one about. Francis wanders the empty streets, past taverns, clothiers, and the family store. At each familiar scene he calls out.

FRANCIS

Hello! This is Francis. I'm
back! Can anyone hear me? Come
out!

But there is no answer. He arrives at the Church of San Ruffino. Stands before the steps.

FRANCIS

Hello! Is there anyone here?

The scenery drops away into the void at his sides, his back. The Church disappears into the abyss. On a pedestal in the midst of emptiness, he falls to his knees, sobs.

A whispering begins, the words can't be understood. Francis cocks his head. It slowly grows audible.

V.O.

Francis, Francis... is this why you
were born... to sing, make merry,
and entice the girls?

He looks up. The scenery has returned. He runs away from the Church and stumbles through streets. The volume grows.

V.O.

Is this why you were born... to
sing, make merry, and entice the
girls!

Exhausted, he stops, plugs his ears, and looks in a store mirror. He sees himself speak the words.

FRANCIS

Francis, Francis... is this why you
were born... to sing, make merry,
and entice the girls?

BACK TO SCENE

Francis eyes open as he lies prostrate on the ground, blood on his face. He pushes himself up and surveys the carnage. His eyes close and he falls over.

Two mounted Perugian KNIGHTS approach. Behind them a horse drawn cart containing prisoners, hands lashed with rope.

KNIGHT ONE

Here! This one looks alive, but wounded. Might as well finish him.

He draws a lance from his saddle and prepares to stab the body of Francis. His companion raises his gloved hand.

KNIGHT TWO

Hold off! A nice suit of armor, must be wealthy. Let's take him back. He could be worth something.

They both dismount and approach the prone body of Francis.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A squad of grim KNIGHTS ride hard across the countryside. The leader is in front on a white stallion, wrapped in a cloak, no weapon visible.

As the sun sets, sweat and exhaustion on their faces.

KNIGHT ONE

We've been at it for hours. We can't reach Rome in a day. When will he stop?

KNIGHT TWO

He says he must spread news of the Crusade, retake Jerusalem. It can't wait.

Still in the wilderness the squad stops. The riders dismount and setup camp.

The leader, POPE INNOCENT, early 40s and strong in stature, examines his horse closely, with obvious affection. Pulls out an apple.

POPE INNOCENT

Here you go boy, good job! You serve God as well as men.

Two of the knights approach him from behind. He turns to face them, they drop to their knees.

KNIGHT ONE

Holy Father, Pope Innocent, what is your command?

Pope Innocent looks toward the horizon.

POPE INNOCENT

We'll rest now. I hope the princes
we visited listened to what I said.
Tomorrow, on to Rome.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA CLASSROOM - DAY

A small classroom of five students. Behind a lectern, a rather short, robed and bearded professor, PIETRO. He reads from a thick book.

SUPER: "University of Bologna - a year later"

One of the students, FRANCESCO, is the smallest and undistinguished. He alone has his head down, writing.

PIETRO

...and Christ said, go and give
whatever you have to the poor.

He closes the book and looks at the students.

PIETRO

Do we take those words literally?
What about the Church, how much is
spent on elegant cathedrals, fine
palaces for the cardinals?

One student sits head and shoulders above the rest. ELIAS is broad chested with a lion's mane of blond hair. He shakes his head, runs fingers through his hair, and stands.

ELIAS

Sir Pietro, your words are
slippery. You wish to make us fall.

Sir Pietro does not stir, just looks at his student. Francesco does not look up, but continues to write.

ELIAS

The Church is Christ's presence on
Earth -- it must reflect his glory!

The simple need that to believe.

Elias nods his head in agreement with his own words. Looks around the classroom as if searching for applause. A few of the students smile, but Francesco is still writing.

PIETRO

Francesco!

Francesco's head pops up, his pencil drops to the floor. A few of the students laugh. Elias smirks at his classmate.

PIETRO

What say you? Is Elias here correct?

Francesco stares around the room, very slowly comes to his feet. His back is bent forward, anxious.

FRANCESCO

No sir, I don't agree.

All eyes are upon him, none of the faces look friendly. Elias moves again as if to speak, but Sir Pietro raises his hand and waves him down.

FRANCESCO

Jesus of Nazareth had no fancy vestments or fine home.

His glory shown by his words, his actions, his sacrifice. The simple saw and believed.

Again Elias wishes to speak, begins to stand.

PIETRO

Enough! We're done for now. We'll continue this discussion tomorrow.

INT. CLOTHING SHOP - DAY

Empty of customers. Francis, a bandaged head, loses his balance and falls. His father rushes to his side.

FRANCIS

I thought I could do it. Went off to fight. Thought I had courage, but I was afraid... afraid to die.

Francis sits up, almost in tears. His father slides down next to him on the floor.

SIR BERNADONE

(almost sobbing)

Son, we were afraid. Scared we'd lost you. Thought you were dead until we got the ransom demand.

Bernadone stands as he aids Francis to his feet. He wipes tears from his eyes.

SIR BERNADONE

We were so relieved. All I've done is for you. To keep you away from the life I had. But if you were gone... then what?

FRANCIS

Papa, I know, I know. Do I return to fight again? A second chance at life, what do I do?

They are both exhausted. There is quiet.

INT. BERNARD DRESS SHOP - DAY

A few years older than Francis, BERNARD has a thriving clothing business. LADY PICA, the mother of Francis, enters. Noble in appearance; friendly in manner.

BERNARD

(bowing)

Welcome, welcome, Madam Bernadone! To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?

LADY PICA

(smiling)

Enough Bernard! Always so dramatic. I want to surprise my husband with a new dress and --

BERNARD

-- I'm sure he has plenty of fine material.

LADY PICA

Bernard, I believe I said surprise.

BERNARD

Ah yes, we'll take a look.

Bernard sorts through bolts of cloth. Her eyes wander. A painting of a nobleman hangs on the wall.

LADY PICA

I marvel at the likeness. A tragedy your father died suddenly. He'd be proud how you stepped in and kept the business going.

Facing away from Lady Pica, a look of anguish crosses his face. He speaks over his shoulder.

BERNARD

And how's Francis? I heard he was injured in battle and captured? I admire him for his courage.

Her face becomes serious. She pauses.

LADY PICA

Yes... he's recovering, but I'm not sure he's ready for the clothing business. He seems a bit restless, not like you Bernard.

Bernard's expression shows uncertainty.

BERNARD

Yes, not like me at all.

EXT. ASSISI - NIGHT

Leo, dressed shabbily, older than Francis, and more worn than when we first saw him, walks through the city. Some of the natives are celebrating. Loud, drunken, and festive!

Leo brushes his clothes off, runs fingers through his hair, and stands a little taller. He approaches.

LEO

Fellow Christians, I've come a long way. Who in this renowned city can give me food, a place to sleep?

Sabatino staggers up drunk.

SABATINO

And who do you think you are, my beauty?

They surround Leo and all laugh to mock the stranger.

LEO

Maybe I'm Christ. Sometimes he appears on earth like this, like a beggar.

SABATINO

Better not repeat that if you know what's good for you! Quick now, move on! Or we might rise up and crucify you!

They continue laughing. Anna, Clara's sister, feels sorry for him.

ANNA

Bernardone's son, Francis, 'Leaky Palms.' He's the one. You're in luck, he's back from war.

SABATINO

Why'd he go fight fitted in gold and plumes? Seems he wanted to become a Knight, come back here to play 'cock of the walk.'

Sabatino raps his own head with his fist.

SABATINO

A bang on the head and our rooster returned with plucked feathers.

He jumps into the air, claps his hands, and encourages his friends to sing.

SABATINO

We've made up a song. Ready lads... all together now!

ALL

He went to Perugia, la-la la-la
He went to Perugia for wool,
He went to Perugia, ta-ra ta-ra
And got himself sheared to the full!!!

The noise, scent of food, and hunger overwhelm Leo. He loses his demeanor, falls against a door post.

LEO

And where is this 'Leaky Palms'?

ANNA

You'll find him in the upper city. Singing under his beloved's window. Clara, my sister. Count Scifi... ask for that house.

Leo staggers off into the dark alleys. He mutters to himself.

LEO

Scared rabbit. You coward... all you've done is for nothing... try to be a man...

EXT. CLARA'S HOME - NIGHT

A high point in the city. A full moon. The music of lutes and the voice of Francis in a French love song. Leo stands away from the group and notices the well dressed singer.

Clara, from the bedroom, holds a rose in her hands as she listens. She wanders near the open veranda, but then stops. Sniffs the rose, smiles, but doesn't go out.

ALL

Let's go Francis (they laugh). It's no use! You think your little countess will throw you the rose? She hasn't come out yet and she isn't going to either!

This time Francis doesn't smile and doesn't answer. He continues to look up. The others move away.

He waits alone for a moment. Walks away. A dog barks behind him. He turns, smiles, and calls without thinking.

FRANCIS

Fido! Here boy!

A skinny black mongrel sprints from the dark, runs away. Francis breathes deep, lifts his hand to his forehead, and runs it slowly down his face. Leo emerges from the dark.

LEO

Excuse me, sir, one thing I want to ask: You eat, drink, wear silk and sing beneath windows. Your life is a party. Does this mean you lack nothing?

Francis turns, is irritated.

FRANCIS

That's right, I lack nothing. Why do you ask?

LEO

Because I pity you.

FRANCIS

(laughs)

You! You pity me?

He looks at Leo more closely. Leo just stares and says nothing.

FRANCIS

Why? Who are you! Dressed like that, like a beggar? Who sent you here to follow me... confess!

There is still no answer from Leo.

FRANCIS

I lack nothing! I don't want pity. I want to be envied. I lack nothing I tell you!

LEO

Nothing? Not even God?

Francis perks up, stands tall and walks toward Leo as he speaks.

FRANCIS

God! You dare talk to me about God!

He stops next to Leo, his voice lowers to a deadly whisper.

FRANCIS

I've seen the battle field. One man lives, another dies, they all bleed red -- where was their God?

Francis takes a look back toward Clara's window.

FRANCIS

God's far away. The earth is good, very good, and near me.

LEO

Nothing is nearer than the Divine. The earth is beneath us and we tread upon it, the Spirit within.

Francis shakes his head, turns and walks away. He stops and looks back.

FRANCIS

All right. Come on. I'll give you food. But don't talk about God. He may be for you, but not me.

EXT. ASSISI - NIGHT

Leo and Francis walk the streets. Francis stumbles a few times, Leo helps him.

LEO
Something wrong? You look weak.

FRANCIS
Nothing, nothing, an old wound,
it'll pass.

They continue on. Francis' face is flushed, he rubs away sweat. They stand outside the door to his home.

FRANCIS
(whisper)
Okay, if you know what's good for
you be quiet. My father's home and
has little pity for beggars.

Francis opens the door, looks back at Leo.

FRANCIS
Leave early. Tomorrow's Sunday and
we'll be at Church. Father wants a
blessing before his trip.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Leo sits at the top of the Church steps, cap in hand. The bells ring summoning the people to morning Mass.

FATHER SILVESTER comes out of the Church, older than Francis and with a stiff demeanor. He looks around, notices Leo.

FATHER SILVESTER
You there, no begging close to the
doors. Move down, out of the way.

Leo nods his head and withdraws.

Sir Bernadone and Lady Pica arrive. Bernadone notices Leo at the bottom of the steps and approaches.

SIR BERNADONE
Begging? You look healthy, what's
wrong?

LEO
Nothing Sir, I'm on a pilgrimage,
searching for God.

SIR BERNADONE

What! God? You have arms and legs. Get to work or may the Devil take you!

Bernadone continues by. Lady Pica approaches, holds a finger to her lips, and drops some coins in his cap.

LADY PICA

(whispering)

Francis has taken ill. He wants you to visit.

Leo casts a glance at the back of Bernadone mounting the church stairs.

LADY PICA

Don't worry. He's leaving on a business trip.

Father Silvester bows to the well known parishioner.

FATHER SILVESTER

Welcome My Lady!

Lady Pica nods her head and enters the Church.

INT. FRANCIS HOME - NIGHT

A well apportioned bedroom, lit by candles. Francis in bed feverish and sweating. Leo at his side.

FRANCIS

You told me your whole life you'd been searching for God. How?

LEO

I asked everyone: saints, sages, madmen, troubadours... Each gave me advice, a path, saying 'Take it and you'll find him!'

FLASHBACK - UNIVERSITY

Leo approaches professor Pietro after a lecture on Religion at the University of Bologna.

PIETRO

Study the Gospels. Read scripture. Meditate on the sacred mysteries.

FLASHBACK - ROCKY, DESOLATE AREA.

Leo sits cross legged next to a MONK dressed in dirty robes, a bedraggled figure.

MONK

Want to find God? Don't
look! Want to see God? Close your
eyes! Hear God? Plug your ears!

The monk closes his eyes, covers his ears, bows his head, and meditates in silence.

FLASHBACK - LAKE

A beautiful WOMAN, naked, emerges from her bath in a crystal blue lake. Beckons invitingly to Leo.

WOMAN

Come. I will show you the path to
the Divine. It is found by love
and through love, the union of a
man and woman.

Leo hesitates, reaches out toward her, almost touches a wet breast, but then turns and runs away.

BACK TO SCENE

FRANCIS

Don't play with me. Who'd you
believe?

Leo hesitates before answering.

LEO

I came across a hermit. He gave me
the most correct answer... the most
frightening.

As Leo speaks, Lady Pica pauses outside the room door, listens.

FLASHBACK - EXTERIOR CAVE

An elderly bearded HERMIT sits on a stone in front of a cave. He looks peaceful, admires the scenery. Leo approaches.

LEO

Holy Ascetic. I have set out to
find God. What is the way?

The hermit smiles at Leo.

HERMIT

There isn't any single road. Don't worry.

The hermit rises and heads to his cave.

LEO

Wait Holy Father. There must be.
The best way. Please....

The hermit turns, looks at Leo closely. His eyes narrow, lips become a straight line.

HERMIT

As you travel your road, when you approach an abyss, do not turn back or go around. Jump!

LEO

(confused)
Abyss! But what? Why?

HERMIT

Many roads lead back to Earth; the abyss leads to God. Jump!

LEO

But, but... I can't.

HERMIT

(smiling)
Then get married and forget your troubles.

BACK TO SCENE

Leo's head is down, cradled in his hands.

LEO

I've searched for years. I can say no more. I was a poor son to my parents, a disappointment, and now I'm a poor man... I'm lost.

Francis faces the wall. Leo is saddened, sighs heavily.

FRANCIS

Don't sigh, father Leo. Who knows, perhaps God is simply the search for God?

Leo's eyes open wide.

LEO

Woe is me! Woe to us! The search
for God... is God!

Silence. Lady Pica slides into the room.

LADY PICA

Francis. I couldn't help hear.

She sits on the bed next to him, caresses his head.

LADY PICA

Francis, Francis... I must tell you
now. Papa told me to keep quiet,
but you must know everything.

He's alert, looks at his mother. Leo backs up, embarrassed,
heads for the door. She stops him.

LADY PICA

Leo, no, I want you to stay. This
was a secret, but no longer. It
happened when I was a young girl.

FLASHBACK - EXT. GARDEN - DAY

A walled garden with blooming flowers and a gate. A teenage
Lady Pica walks among the flowers. Near the gate a
beautiful red geranium. She stares at the flower.

The roar of an angry crowd in the distance. The gate bangs
opens. A tall, bearded, dirty and sweating MONK PETER
enters, slams it shut.

She is frozen in place, eyes wide. He turns toward her and
opens his arms.

MONK PETER

Peace to this house and all who
live here.

LADY PICA

(confused, frightened)

My father, Lord Pica... not here.
Who are you... what... why?

MONK PETER

I'm Peter, pursued by the enemies
of Christ. I visit villages and
drive all fornicators, liars and
thieves from God's temple!

The clamor in the street increases as the crowd nears. They are banging, yelling, searching. A bell from a Church rings furiously.

The monk clenches his fist and turns away from the girl. He glues his face against the door.

MONK PETER
 (gritting his teeth)
 They smell him in the air. Smell
 Christ, their great enemy. They
 want to crucify him again.

Lady Pica looks back and forth. Starts to move away, but stops. Stares at the geranium.

The monk approaches and regards the flower with her. He picks up the pot holding the plant and lets it go. In slow motion, the pot descends, hits the pavement, and shatters.

MONK PETER
 Aren't you ashamed! To lose
 yourself by regarding the creatures
 instead of the Creator!

He slowly leans over, picks up the plant and dangles it by the roots.

MONK PETER
 (more softly)
 Things blind us from seeing the
 Invisible. Look past them. Open
 your eyes.

INT. FRANCIS HOME - NIGHT

Francis looks up at his mother, then at Leo.

FRANCIS
 Mama, no, no, no! What do you say
 father Leo?

LEO
 What can I say. I'm a cloddish
 sort. To believe I have to see,
 hear, touch.

FRANCIS
 Beauty is God's creation. That I'm
 sure of.

Taking on a more severe expression.

FRANCIS

The geranium that was despoiled by
your monk, Mama, is going to hurl
him into Hell.

Lady Pica smiles at Francis, smooths his hair.

LADY PICA

He saved me. What's a flower next
to a human spirit? He'll enter
Paradise with the geranium in his
hand... simply because he saved me.

FRANCIS

What? How? Didn't your father
throw him out? Put an end to it
that day?

FLASHBACK - EXT. GARDEN - DAY

The monk reaches out with a smile and puts both dirty hands
on her head. A flood of expressions cross her face.

LADY PICA (V.O)

I felt a flame descend into my
brain, invade my throat, burn my
insides. I felt like bursting into
tears, laughing, dancing. What was
this flame? It must be God. It
must be God.

FRANCIS (V.O)

And then Mama? And then?

LADY PICA (V.O)

I took leave of my senses. My
father's house wasn't big
enough. I threw away my sandals
and went after him!

Lady Pica and the monk go from village to village. She
follows as he preaches. Eventually found by one of her
father's knights, tossed on horseback, and returned home.

INT. FRANCIS HOME - NIGHT

Lady Pica stands and walks toward the door.

LADY PICA

That's enough for now... sleep.

There is quiet for a while after she exits. Francis shakes his head. The room is darker, more somber.

LEO

What's the matter Francis? Why are you quivering so?

FRANCIS

(starting as a whisper, grows to a shout)

My mother's blood... her blood. Didn't you hear her story? Madness!

LEO

It wasn't madness that moved her.

Francis sits up.

FRANCIS

Madness! I too dreamed and threw off my sandals... jumped. I plummeted downward. Held out my hand to catch hold of something, but just found air!

He falls back in exhaustion. His eyes close and he sleeps. Leo remains.

INT. FRANCIS HOME - NIGHT

Francis asleep, Leo watches. The face of Francis becomes active, eyes move beneath closed lids.

DREAM - FRANCIS VISITED BY SAN DAMIANO

A robed figure comes to the side of his bed, crying. Francis eyes open, he looks at the figure.

FRANCIS

What happened Saint of God? You're in heaven, aren't you? Is there weeping even there?

SAN DAMIANO

Yes, even there, for those still crawling on earth. But why do you sleep, Francis? Shame on you! The Church is in danger!

Francis sits up in bed.

FRANCIS
A Church? But what can I do?

SAN DAMIANO
Reach out, place your shoulder
against it. Don't let it fall!

FRANCIS
I? Bernadone's son?

SAN DAMIANO
You, Francis of Assisi. The world
is crumbling, the Church descended
to the state of my little chapel; a
tottering ruin. Build it up!

The Saint grabs Francis by the shoulder and pushes him back
to his bed.

BACK TO SCENE

Francis is asleep.

INT. FRANCIS HOME - DAY

Francis awakens, cool and refreshed. Leo at his side.

FRANCIS
Father Leo, how good to see
you. I feel strong and ready.

LEO
Ready? Ready for what my young
stalwart?

FRANCIS
To rebuild a Church. San Damiano
came to me in my dreams and ordered
me to rebuild his Church.

INT. BISHOP GUIDO HOME - DAY

BISHOP GUIDO of Assisi and guests finish a luscious dinner
in a luxurious room. There are different roast meats, trays
of fruit, and beautiful cakes. Much remains on the table.

GUEST
Bishop Guido, many thanks! You set
the finest table in all Assisi.

BISHOP GUIDO

We're blessed. Have a safe return home.

The guests leave. The Bishop and a few SERVANTS remain.

SERVANT

Bishop, it's raining and late. Do you still wish to go out?

BISHOP GUIDO

(curtly)

What, a little rain. I won't melt! Make preparation and we'll go.

INT. CLARA HOME - DAY

In the kitchen, Clara has her back turned to Anna. The middle of an argument.

CLARA

Look, just be quiet will you. I'm sick of hearing about you and Sabattino!

Anna is placing some fruit in a basket.

ANNA

I'm just trying to say you should quit teasing Francis. He's been through a lot.

Clara grimaces. Turns quickly.

CLARA

What! You don't think I know that?

ANNA

Okay, forget it. Rita will be here soon, let's have our picnic.

Clara relaxes, smiles. Folds a table cloth and places it in the basket. Walks toward another table and folds napkins.

CLARA

The war, it changed him somehow. He doesn't see things the same way.

Anna walks up behind her sister.

ANNA

Well, I hear he's better. With the
ragged monk, his new friend.
Whatever's wrong with him?

Clara tenses, takes a deep breath, rolls her eyes.

EXT. ASSISI - DAY

The back streets of Assisi, homes of the poor. The Bishop walks through the puddles of water, followed by two servants with baskets of food.

He stops and hands food to each household. The elderly smile with gratitude. Children are gleeful to have the pastry treats.

EXT. SAN DAMIANO CHURCH - DAY

The Church is a wreck, the door ajar on damaged hinges. It's a beautiful day and the birds sing. Francis and Leo enter and it grows quiet.

SUPER: "Church of San Damiano"

FRANCIS

Leo, what's wrong. San Damiano may
appear to us.

LEO

Wrong? What if there are devils
here also?

A dark interior, paintings on the walls, a large crucified Christ in front. They proceed slowly, fearful. They approach the altar and hear a sound of rustling.

They huddle together and look around with anxiety, speak in whispers.

LEO

Do you hear that. Rats?

FRANCIS

No, maybe Angels are
present? But... we should leave.
We'll start on the outside first.

There is a burst of laughter and three girls run from hiding behind the altar and out the door.

EXT. SAN DAMIANO CHURCH - DAY

Leo and Francis follow. Clara approaches the two men.

CLARA
(teasing)
Welcome to our humble house, Sir
Francis.

Francis doesn't respond. His mouth trembles.

LEO
This is San Damiano's house. When
did you take possession?

ANNA
This morning, we brought a basket
of fruit to spend the day.

Clara focuses on Francis, smiles, bows.

CLARA
If Sir Francis will be kind enough
to eat with us, we welcome him.

FRANCIS
(softly, slowly)
I'm glad to see you Clara.

His sound and demeanor trouble Clara and she loses her smile.

CLARA
We came to have a picnic.

FRANCIS
Not me. I had a dream.

CLARA
I heard you were ill? Are you
okay?

FRANCIS
I was ill before I fell ill.

CLARA
I don't understand.

FRANCIS
Maybe one day you will.

They stare at each other. The moment becomes awkward.

CLARA

I, I heard you singing near my home.

FRANCIS

You heard me Clara, but you won't hear me again.

She shakes her head. Her long blond hair, tied in a ribbon, comes undone, falls to her shoulders. The single gold crucifix still hangs around her neck. Her head falls.

CLARA

Why?

FRANCIS

I don't know. Don't ask. Perhaps I'll sing beneath another window.

Her head pops up.

CLARA

Some other window. Whose? Where?

FRANCIS

(very softly)
God's.

She does not hear clearly, approaches closer.

CLARA

What? Whose window?

The other girls grow tired and anxious. Anna calls her sister.

ANNA

Come on Clara, forget about him, let's have our picnic.

Clara, looks at Francis, waits for an answer. Francis stares at the ground. She ties her hair back up.

CLARA

Come, we'll go somewhere else. Let Sir Francis stay here... it appears he had a dream!

The girls skip away. Leo stares quizzically at Francis, who stares at the ground, almost paralyzed.

FRANCIS
We're saved.

He falls to his knees and watches as the girls walk away.

FRANCIS
We're saved father Leo, we can now
begin work.

EXT. SAN DAMIANO CHURCH - DAY

Francis and Leo are outside.

FRANCIS
Let's gather stones. I have some
money. We'll buy cement and
tools!

LEO
When do we start?

FRANCIS
Now! San Damiano's is falling
apart. But also our souls. They
too are in ruin.

MONTAGE - WORKING ON CHURCH

- Francis and Leo gather tools.
- Shop for bricks and cement.
- Collect stones.
- Work on the Church.
- Enjoy simple meals together.

BACK TO SCENE

Francis and Leo relax, sitting on grass outside the church
after a meal. They stand and Leo takes a deep breath, faces
his friend with a serious look.

LEO
Forgive me for asking, but when
will your father return?

Francis loses his smile, looks at the Church.

FRANCIS
I expect him back soon.

Leo looks intently at Francis, waits.

LEO
And then?

Francis turns away, looks down.

FRANCIS
I'm not sure. I must decide. The
abyss...

A figure approaches the pair. DON PETER wears an old cassock
and walks with a cane. Leo sees him first.

LEO
Look, could it be. San Damiano has
come to greet us!?

Leo crosses himself. Francis turns to look.

LEO
May God help us --

FRANCIS
-- No need to fear Leo, it's not
the Saint, it's old Don Peter, the
curate. I know him.

Don Peter gets closer and stops to look at the
work. Francis and Leo stand proudly.

FRANCIS
We are repairing the Church. San
Damiano came to me in a dream.

The old priest stands erect at these words. A hard
expression forms on his face. He is bitter.

DON PETER
To you? I've grown old in his
service. He's eaten me out of
house and home. Oil to keep his
lamp lit, incense for the altar!

The priest looks around, turns, becomes even more agitated.

DON PETER
Did he ever appear to me in my
dreams! Say something
pleasant! Restore my Faith!

He pounds the walking stick against the ground.

DON PETER

Never! And now, the final
insult! You, Bernadone's debauched
Son, who roams the streets and
sings!

FRANCIS

(softly)

Yes, Father, that's who I am. The
depraved and prodigal son.

DON PETER

What can God expect from you?

FRANCIS

Nothing. But I expect everything.

DON PETER

What! You want more! You've
glutted yourself and you're still
not satisfied! What else?

FRANCIS

My life. My Soul.

The priest becomes calm. Lowers his head. Sits down on a
ledge. The work continues.

INT. FRANCIS HOME - MORNING

Sir Bernadone returns home. Enters the house and sweeps
Lady Pica up, a huge, passionate hug.

SIR BERNADONE

How I've missed you! I must make
these trips, but I worry about you.

LADY PICA

No need, you're home safely!

SIR BERNADONE

And where is Francis? I expected to
see him, sleeping late?

LADY PICA

(hesitating)

He's gone... working.

SIR BERNADONE

Excellent! Glad to see him at the shop early. Taking care of business.

Lady Pica turns away, takes a few steps, and turns.

LADY PICA

Yes... he is working at a Church.

SIR BERNADONE

A Church? Delivering new robes for a priest?

Lady Pica turns away again. Bernadone grows anxious, follows her.

SIR BERNADONE

What? What type of work?

LADY PICA

(quickly)

He is rebuilding San Damiano's. He hasn't been to the shop in days.

Bernadone sits down, bangs his fist on the table.

SIR BERNADONE

What! Why didn't you say so sooner. You're too soft, quit trying to protect him. He's a man now.

Lady Pica turns back toward him.

LADY PICA

Look, you've been away. He fell sick again, he's changed.

She looks at a wooden crucifix hanging on the wall over the shoulder of Bernadone.

LADY PICA

He feels called by God to the work.

Bernadone looks at her closely, pushes the table away and stands.

SIR BERNADONE

Called? We'll see.

EXT. SAN DAMIANO CHURCH - DAY

A hot day, no breeze. The air shimmers as the heat rises. Francis, on the roof, and Leo, below, work as Sir Bernadone approaches.

SIR BERNADONE

Heah there! Master craftsmen! Come down, I need you.

Bernadone stops and rests against his walking stick. Francis stands on the roof, pulls off his cap, and bows.

FRANCIS

Welcome to Sir Bernardone. What do you want?

SIR BERNADONE

My shop is falling to pieces! Come and repair it!

FRANCIS

Sorry Sir Bernadone. I don't repair shops... I demolish them!

The priest comes out, notices the argument, and draws back to watch. Bernadone raises his fist, yells.

SIR BERNADONE

Don't you know me! I'm your father!

FRANCIS

Sorry Sir Bernadone, my father is God and no one else.

The sweat grows on Bernadone's brow. He's the figure of a raging bull and kicks the ground. Dust rises around him.

SIR BERNADONE

Yes! Yes! Is that what you say. Then who am I!

FRANCIS

(calmly)

You're Sir Bernadone who owns a shop and robs the rich and poor.

Bernadone stamps his feet, lifts the walking stick.

SIR BERNADONE

Damn you! Come down here and get the beating you deserve!

Without hesitation, Francis drops from the roof and quietly walks toward his father. Brushes dirt from his clothes and wipes his hands.

Bernadone doesn't move. Francis approaches. He slaps Francis with his right hand. Francis' hands remain down at his side.

FRANCIS

Thank you.

Turns to face the other cheek toward his father. A red welt rises on his dusty face. Beads of sweat track down.

FRANCIS

Strike the other also Sir
Bernadone. Strike again or it
might feel offended.

Bernadone eyes grow wide. Francis bows his head. Bernadone shakes his head, slowly raises his walking stick.

Leo moves between them.

LEO

Sir Bernadone. In the name of God,
stop!

Francis pushes Leo out of the way.

FRANCIS

Do not interfere father Leo, this
is my destiny. Sir Bernadone is
helping me find my way.

Francis looks back to his father.

FRANCIS

Strike Sir Bernadone. I've failed
you. Strike!

NO SOUND

Bernadone has more sweat on his brow. Arm raised, his lips tremble. The muscles in his arms bulge and flex, but the cane does not move downward. His eyes shut.

He grows faint, starts to collapse. Francis jumps forward to catch his father and lay him on the ground. The priest brings water to sprinkle on his forehead.

Francis, exhausted, sits cross legged as Leo and the priest attempt to revive Bernadone.

He finally wakes, gets to his feet, picks up his stick, and walks away. No words are spoken.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

In growing darkness Francis and Leo walk through the woods. The wind blows through the trees, the first raindrops fall.

LEO
And now what? Will someone take us
in?

FRANCIS
I remember a cave. We can sleep
there.

LEO
And then?

FRANCIS
(slowly)
We can sleep there.

The two companions enter a cave and lay down.

EXT. CAVE - NIGHT

Francis stands outside the mouth of the cave. It is raining. A hooded Clara is speaking with him in whispers.

CLARA
I heard the rumor, your father, and
came to find you.

FRANCIS
But how did you find us? Won't
your parents be worried?

Clara grabs hold of his shoulders.

CLARA
Don't worry about that now. Let's
go, away from here, start a new
life.

Francis opens his mouth to speak, but stops and just stares.

CLARA
Francis, I know you're
suffering. I'm beginning to
understand.

She pulls close to him. Puts her head on his shoulder.

CLARA

I just want to be with you.

Francis breathes in the scent of her hair. Hesitates for a moment.

FRANCIS

And I with you... and I with you.

He gives her a deep kiss. The water drips from their heads.

Suddenly, he awakens. His mouth is pressed against the dirt floor. He spits out the debris, pounds the floor of the cave with his fists, and cries.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Leo awakens, no Francis in sight, is startled. He turns toward the mouth of the cave.

Francis, his back to Leo, sits cross-legged on the ground. His head is between his hands, facing the rising sun. He is softly sobbing.

Leo remains quiet. Watches his companion cry. He makes a loud noise and rolls over.

Francis hears the sound, lays down, and feints sleep.

LEO

Brother Francis, are you awake?

FRANCIS

Yes, yes, I was out cold. Look, a new day is beginning.

LEO

And now?

FRANCIS

I have to jump father Leo, there is no other way.

LEO

Jump? The Abyss? Surely yesterday... your father... was enough.

FRANCIS
 (anguished)
 No, not enough. Yesterday was the
 preparation, the run up. Today...
 the leap.

LEO
 Where? How?

FRANCIS
 In Assisi.

Francis pauses, takes a long look at Leo, and a smile comes
 to his face.

FRANCIS
 Brother Leo, can you dance?

INT. FRANCIS HOME - DAY

Sir Bernadone and Lady Pica sit at lunch. For a while they
 eat in silence.

LADY PICA
 Francis did not return last night.

She cries. Bernadone's head is down.

LADY PICA
 I'm afraid he's gone. My son...

SIR BERNADONE
 (slowly)
 By his own choice. His choice.

LADY PICA
 Just wait, he'll return.

Bernadone pushes back his chair, stands.

SIR BERNADONE
 (growing angry)
 No... your fault, your blood! Our
 son is mad! The same madness of
 your youth!

LADY PICA
 How can you say that!

SIR BERNADONE
 I should never have married
 you. They told me, said you were
 (MORE)

SIR BERNADONE (cont'd)
crazy, had run away... now, our
son.

LADY PICA
(tears forming, softly)
No... it can't be. Not Francis.

SIR BERNADONE
All I've worked for. All we have.
Where will it go?

There is quiet. From outside a growing sound can be heard.
A crowd, yelling, laughter,

SIR BERNADONE
And now what! Another drunk, some
spectacle. Can't we be in peace!

He moves toward the door.

EXT. ASSISI SQUARE - DAY

Francis walks slowly, head down, and Leo behind. They head
toward the town square.

Francis stops and his head comes up. Smiles, takes a
confident stature, hops and twirls from side to side, claps
his hands, and yells.

FRANCIS
Come one! Come all! Come and hear
the new madness!

Kids in the street first watch and then follow,
laughing. Francis dances and Leo follows, but quietly.

FRANCIS
Whoever throws one stone at me, may
he be one time blessed by
God! Whoever throws two stones at
me, may he be two times blessed by
God!

People in the crowd look at each other, pickup stones,
garbage from the street, and throw. Francis takes a look
toward Leo. Winks.

FRANCIS
Brother Leo, we'll have plenty of
stone for the church after today!

Bernard looks out the door of his shop and sees Francis. He watches silently.

FRANCIS

Come one! Come all! Hear the new
madness!

Francis passes the bar. A drunken Sabatino emerges. Smiles when he sees Francis. Picks up a rotten orange and follows.

EXT. ASSISI SQUARE FOUNTAIN - DAY

Francis reaches the square with blood on his face. Leaps on the side of a fountain. Stands next to a statue of the Good Shepherd which is part of the fountain.

CROWD MEMBERS

Yes, tell us! Tell us! What is the
new madness.

Francis opens his arms skyward. A house door opens just past the crowd, it is Bernadone.

FRANCIS

Brothers! Sisters! Love! Love!
Love!

People in the crowd stop, look at each other.

CROWD MEMBERS

What? What's he saying? We should
love each other?

FRANCIS

Open you hearts! Open your
eyes! See with your spirit!

Francis continues to yell the same words and dances around the fountain. The crowd falls silent, confused.

FRANCIS

What did Christ command!? We must
love God and each other! Can't you
see? We are brothers, sisters!

Bernadone's face darkens. He pushes his way through the crowd and reaches Francis.

SIR BERNADONE

Enough! Come with me!

FRANCIS

Where? My place is here.

Bernadone grabs his son. Francis wraps his arm around a statue. The crowd laughs.

Clara and her mother pass by. Her mother rolls her eyes. Wags her head at Clara. Tears come to Clara as she watches.

SIR BERNADONE

Home! You're sick! You can rest.
I'm taking you home!

FRANCIS

My home is here. These are my
brothers and sisters.

Sabatino moves out of the crowd, jumps on the fountain.

SABATINO

We haven't a buffoon to help us
pass the time. Now, praise the
Lord, we've Bernadone and his son.

Sabatino lifts his arms. The crowd breaks out in laughter.

SABATINO

Francis, God's trained bear. Jump
for us! Dance!

The crowd parts and grows quiet. The Bishop of Assisi returns from his rounds of charity, the servants with baskets are behind him. He notices Bernadone and Francis.

BISHOP GUIDO

Sir Bernadone, what are you
doing? Why this spectacle?

He still holds his son by the waist.

SIR BERNADONE

Bishop, my son has gone mad!

BISHOP GUIDO

Stop! Release him.

He lets go.

FRANCIS

I have no father. Only God.

BISHOP GUIDO
And you. What disrespect. Silence!

There is quiet. Bernadone and Francis are exhausted.

BISHOP GUIDO
Now, follow me to the Cathedral. I
will hear your complaint.

Leo, who has been laying low, follows after them.

INT. CATHEDRAL OFFICE - DAY

The office resembles a court room. The Bishop sits in a raised and ornate chair. Behind him, on the wall, is a large wooden crucifix. Christ is portrayed in agony.

Francis and Bernadone stand within a few feet of each other and the crowd farther back. There is silence.

The Bishop crosses himself.

BISHOP GUIDO
Sir Pietro Bernadone. In God's
name I'm listening. What is your
complaint against your son?

SIR BERNADONE
Bishop Guido, my son is no longer
in his right mind. He has insane
dreams, hears voices in the air,
takes my money and squanders it on
the poor --

BISHOP GUIDO
-- On the poor?

SIR BERNADONE
He sleeps in caves, weeps and
laughs without reason. He rebuilds
churches. But today it went too
far. Coming to the square and
dancing like a fool!

BISHOP GUIDO
And so, what do you wish?

Bernadone stands silent, turns and looks at Francis, turns
back toward the Bishop

SIR BERNADONE

Before God and man I disown him.
Disinherit him. He's no longer my
son.

Gossiping in the crowd. The Bishop motions for silence,
looks at Francis.

BISHOP GUIDO

And you my son. What say
you? What is your response?

FRANCIS

Nothing, only this.

Francis strips off his clothes and places them at the feet
of his father. He stands naked.

FRANCIS

These clothes belonged to him. I'm
returning them. He no longer has a
son... I no longer have a father.
Our accounts are settled.

There is silence. Bernadone picks up the clothes and looks
at his naked son. Some in the crowd have tears.

The Bishop asks an attendant for a gardener's cloak, comes
down off his throne, and covers Francis.

BISHOP GUIDO

(softly)

Why? Why did you do it? Aren't you
ashamed in front of these people?

Francis pauses, looks at his father, the people.

FRANCIS

No, not ashamed. These are my
brothers and sisters. This is the
new madness! I'm free at last!

He looks at Leo.

FRANCIS

Brother Leo! Let us go!

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

A bright moonlit evening as Francis and Leo walk, but the path falls into deep shadows ahead. Francis leads, but Leo occasionally looks back to the city lights.

FRANCIS

What a beautiful evening Brother Leo. The air has never smelled so sweet.

LEO

(hesitating)

Yes... yes, a wonderful night it will be.

Francis looks back at his companion, stops, and puts a hand on his shoulder.

FRANCIS

Forgive me Brother Leo. I drag you along. You're free. No need to take this path.

Leo looks back at the city lights. Turns back to Francis, their faces only inches away.

LEO

What you did... back there... how? Why?

Francis stares back at the city. Looks at Leo and smiles.

FRANCIS

I might ask the same. Why are you here? With me? The man who dances and sings and yells love.

Leo opens his mouth to speak, but closes it. His brow forms a furrow. Slowly his arms come up and he grasps Francis by both shoulders.

LEO

You. You're real. More than an idea or just talk. You live what you believe.

FRANCIS

I try. I've never seen God and I don't know if I ever will, but Jesus of Nazareth was real. With every fabric of his being he believed we all have a loving Father.

Leo grabs the worn robe Francis now wears.

LEO
But this? Why?

FRANCIS
Not for all or for many. But a few
who try to live the dream are
always needed.

Francis puts a hand on Leo's shoulder.

FRANCIS
Will you leave?

There is quiet. The sound of nightlife can be heard. Leo
looks back at the city and at the darkened path ahead.

LEO
No... no... I can't leave now that
I've found you, but...

FRANCIS
But... Brother Leo?

LEO
Forgive me, where shall we spend
the night? Where do we sleep?

Francis laughs and gives Leo a slap on the back.

FRANCIS
Do not fear. God will provide. Now
forward.

LEO
(to himself)
Yes, God will provide... I hope.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Four marauders lurk in bushes near the path. Francis and
Leo walk unawares. Suddenly, two emerge and block the path
to the front while two more block the path behind.

CROOK ONE
Stop! If you value your lives, do
not resist. Who are you?

Francis stands boldly, spreads his arms.

FRANCIS

Us? We are emissaries of the great king!

CROOK ONE

Emissaries of a king? You look like beggars, let's see.

The four shake down Francis and Leo, empty their sack and find nothing... flabbergasted.

CROOK TWO

Well, let's teach them a lesson!

They beat Francis and Leo with staffs. Throw them into a nearby ditch.

CROOK ONE

Sweat dreams my hearties!

They break out in laughter and disappear down the path. Leo moans and Francis softly pats his back.

FRANCIS

Does it hurt?

LEO

And am I to suppose yours doesn't!? My back is made of flesh, and there are times when --

Francis raises a hand.

FRANCIS

-- No more. The flesh is necessary if we are to become spirit.

Leo looks up at the ditch wall, he's exhausted.

LEO

Well, we might as well make the best of it. Here we stay for the night.

They get comfortable and close. A growing sound of crickets and other night life. Francis softly chuckles.

LEO

And now? What's so funny?

FRANCIS

Don't you see Brother Leo. It's all been arranged perfectly. You

(MORE)

FRANCIS (cont'd)
 were wondering where we'd sleep and
 here we are!

Leo rolls his eyes.

LEO
 Yes, here we are, just perfect.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The marauders walk along the path far from Francis and Leo.

CROOK TWO
 Well boss, not a bad nights work,
 but strange those two.

CROOK ONE
 (distracted)
 Yes, I've been thinking about
 them... especially the happy one.
 Nothing in his bag and beaten.

CROOK TWO
 Crazy as a saint I'd say.

Crook One looks back over his shoulder.

CROOK ONE
 Yes... as a saint.

INT. BOLOGNA UNIVERSITY - DAY

Professor Pietro sits at his office desk as he talks with
 his younger student Francesco.

PIETRO
 Francesco, excellent thesis paper
 on the mystery of the Trinity.

Francesco smiles at his teacher, coughs several times as he
 speaks.

FRANCESCO
 Professor, my thanks to you.

PIETRO
 Yes, some day you may surpass my
 works! You make me jealous.

Francesco still coughs. Pietro pulls a small bottle of
 clear liquid from his desk.

PIETRO

You look a little sick. Here, take care of yourself. Something sweet for that cough.

Francesco nods his head, takes the bottle, and leaves. Pietro stands up and walks to a bookshelf containing many of his works. Runs his hands along the shelf. Smiles.

As Francesco closes the door behind him, he almost runs into Elias. Elias ignores him, knocks and enters.

ELIAS

Sir Pietro, I have made my decision.

Pietro sits, calmly looks up at the giant that stands before him. Elias paces like a lion back and forth as he speaks.

ELIAS

I need to breathe. I'll leave and travel through the country, help the people. So many are ignorant. They need guidance.

Pietro stands, smiles, and extends his hand.

PIETRO

Congratulations on your decision. I wish you well.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Francis and Leo approach a small village. Leo is exhausted, but Francis looks eager, grows excited.

FRANCIS

Look Leo! A village! People!

LEO

Finally! My stomach's forgotten food. Maybe some good person will take us in.

Leo rubs his belly and smiles.

LEO

And after a hot meal, glory be to God!

FRANCIS
Leo, Leo! First the belly and then
God?

LEO
(a bit defensive)
Why yes. The natural order.

FRANCIS
All right, we'll see. Have you
forgotten so soon?

Leo pats himself down.

LEO
Forgotten, I have nothing to
forget! What are you getting at?

Francis smiles at Leo and gives a wink as he speaks.

FRANCIS
Can you dance?

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Francis finds a huge cow bell and rings it wildly as they
enter the village.

FRANCIS
Helloooo villagers!!!! Come and
see! I bring new wares that I'm
about to distribute for free!
Follow me and see!

Villagers follow as Francis continues to ring the bell.

FRANCIS
First come first served!
Free! Free! Free!

LEO
(whispering)
We've nothing to give
them. They'll murder us.

FRANCIS
(still shouting)
We bring wares more valuable than
any amount of wealth or power!

The people in the crowd are confused, they follow, but
become skeptical.

CROWD MEMBER

All right, what is it. What do you have, show us!

Francis mounts a monument to speak.

FRANCIS

Open your eyes! See with your spirit! We're all brothers and sisters. We share this Earth not only with each other, but with the birds, the animals, and even the grass beneath our feet!

NO SOUND

Francis speaks, greets many people. Some laugh, but some are serious, thinking.

A TINKLING bell can be heard, grows louder. A leper approaches Francis, but he pulls back, withdraws. Leo notices, but says nothing.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Francis and Leo walk. It's a beautiful day. Leo is vibrant. Francis is quiet and looks toward the ground.

LEO

Brother Francis, what a day. What wonder God's creation!

He looks at Francis who just walks and says nothing.

LEO

What a blessing, the village family that fed us!

He looks again for a response from Francis, but just a stare.

LEO

Listen to the birds. Praising their creator night has ended and day returned. All part of God's will.

Francis is finally stirred. Stops.

FRANCIS

(haltingly)

(MORE)

FRANCIS (cont'd)
 God's will... his will you
 say? That we do the most
 difficult... nothing more.

Leo stops, measures his friend.

LEO
 What? What happened to you?

FRANCIS
 Yesterday... the leper.

LEO
 The leper? But what could you
 do? How could we have helped?

FRANCIS
 (slowly)
 Yes, but I knew him.

Leo grabs Francis by the shoulders.

LEO
 You knew him!

FRANCIS
 Yes, I realized last night... as I
 slept.

DREAM - FROM THE VIEW OF THE LEPER.

The LEPER watches Leo and Francis as they turn, walk away.

LEPER
 (grows quieter as they fade
 into the distance, slurred
 speech)
 Please. Can you help me? I'm so
 alone? Please. I have no one.

He sobs, turns away and walks out of the square. His bell
 rings distinctly, warning others.

LEPER
 I'm sorry, I can't help how I am.
 It just happened.

He shuffles, people notice and turn away. His breathing is
 labored. His hands can barely grasp a staff, fingers are
 almost gone, arms with festering wounds.

He stops at a fountain to drink. The water offers a clear reflection. He looks at himself. His lips are distorted, eyes almost closed.

LEPER
 (frustration, anger, finally
 sobbing)
 Why? My life, my dreams? Why
 me? Why? Why me?

As he speaks the sores and disfigurement disappear. The face of Francis emerges.

FRANCIS(V.O.)
 No! No! Not me! Not me! Not me!

BACK TO SCENE

Francis falls to the ground sobbing.

FRANCIS
 Not me! A leper? Lord, not me!

Leo kneels, embraces his friend to calm his fears.

LEO
 It'll be okay, don't worry, we'll
 steer clear of any lepers.

Francis turns his head, listens.

FRANCIS
 Do you hear? Listen...

There is a rise ahead in the path. The TINKLING of a leper's bell comes from the other side, growing louder. Leo hears it, panics, and looks side to side.

LEO
 Brother Francis, we'll turn, take
 another path.

FRANCIS
 (desperate)
 Where? How can we escape
 God? If there were a hundred
 paths, they'd all be filled with
 bells.

LEO
 But why, what can we do? We have
 nothing to help a leper!

FRANCIS

(quietly)

Have you forgotten... St. Peter. I
have neither silver or gold, but
what I have, I give you.

The bell grows louder.

LEO

(exasperated)

But what! We're no miracle
workers!

Francis stands erect, moves forward toward the crest of the hill. The leper comes into view.

Francis breaks into a run toward him. The leper (another sick figure), rings his bell loudly. A very small man, he's panicked and afraid as Francis runs toward him.

NO SOUND, SLOW MOTION

The leper falls to his knees as Francis grows close. He kneels in front of the leper, pulls back the hood covering his head, half the face melting away.

Francis embraces and kisses the man. The leper's arms, first tense around Francis, relax. One hand still grasps a staff. He lets go, grasps Francis, and the staff falls like a tree.

SOUND RETURNS

Leo gets close and looks at the Leper, can't stand the sight, turns away.

FRANCIS

(to the leper)

It's okay. You're not alone any
more. You're not alone.

Francis lifts the leper, wrapped in robes, covers him in his arms and walks down the path. Leo follows.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Francis and Leo walk as a villager approaches. Francis carries the leper, still hidden by robes.

FRANCIS

Brother! I have a sick friend
here, where can we go for help?

VILLAGER

(confused, looks at Leo)
Who, him? Not quite a beauty, but
he doesn't look sick to me?

Leo rolls his eyes and sighs. Francis uncovers the robs as he speaks.

FRANCIS

No, no, no. Can't you see? My
brother! I'm carrying him in my
arms, in these robes.

Francis pulls away some of the cloth, but no leper is visible.

VILLAGER

What, a kid's trick? I have no
time for this.

He walks away. Realization comes to the faces of Francis and Leo. Francis drops his arms. The robes fall. There is no leper. Leo crosses himself.

LEO

My God, what happened?

Francis pauses, looks down at the empty rags.

FRANCIS

Leo, when we kiss a needy brother
or sister on the lips, they become
Christ.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

MONTAGE - FRANCIS VISITS OTHER VILLAGES

-- Ringing of the bell.

-- Walking through the woods with Leo.

-- Francis dancing and speaking to people.

BACK TO SCENE

Francis is almost done preaching when Bernard approaches him, smiling. The two embrace warmly.

BERNARD

Francis, Francis, my old
friend. Who brought you to such a
state?

FRANCIS
 (warmly)
 God.

BERNARD
 But your silk clothes, your
 feathered cap, your golden rings?

FRANCIS
 The Devil loaned them to me, but
 I've returned them.

Bernard pauses, takes a more serious look at his friend and his worn robes.

BERNARD
 Where are you coming from?

FRANCIS
 The old world.

BERNARD
 And where are you going.

FRANCIS
 To the next world.

BERNARD
 And why do you sing?

FRANCIS
 To keep from losing my way.

Bernard smiles, puts an arm around him.

BERNARD
 If I understand correctly you want
 to save the world. But listen,
 it's winter. If you die of cold,
 how will you save the world then?

Francis spreads out his arms, lifts his sandaled feet.

FRANCIS
 I'm wearing God. I'm not cold.

Bernard looks at Leo, who just shrugs his shoulders. Bernard slaps Francis on the back and chuckles.

BERNARD
 Yes, but that's not enough. You
 need a warm coat!

Bernard takes a closer look.

BERNARD

Look, you pity worms and won't step
on them; well, pity your body
also. It too is a worm and needs a
coat. Without the body --

Francis raises his hand, smiles.

FRANCIS

-- Bernard, you're right! Education
made you a sharp-witted
fellow. The body is God's creature
also. We'll stop at your home
soon!

EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE MONASTERY - NIGHT

Francis and Leo are in a down pour plodding through muddy
paths. Leo grimaces at the weather.

FRANCIS

Brother Leo, prick up your ears,
listen. I have the feeling you
don't like the life we're
leading. You are fretting.

LEO

(exasperated)

No, Brother Francis, I'm not
fretting. But we are all
human. You forget that fact. I
don't. It's as simple as that.

FRANCIS

Brother Leo, do you know what
perfect joy is?

Leo doesn't answer, but a smile spreads across his face as
they walk.

DREAM - EXT. DAY

They approach a monastery. The doorkeeper welcomes, sets
them in front a fire to dry their clothes.

Warm food is brought and one of the brothers brings up a jug
of vintage wine for them to drink. Leo takes the mug and
cocks back his head to drink...

BACK TO SCENE

Back to the woods and rain, Leo's mouth is open to the sky
as if drinking.

FRANCIS

Leo, wake up, in a few moments you
will know perfect joy.

They approach a monastery wall with a locked gate. They
knock. A face through a small window in the gate, drinking
from a wine jug.

GATE KEEPER

(gruffly)

Who's here at such an hour!

FRANCIS

Open the gate, Brother
Doorkeeper. We're humble servants
of Christ. Hungry and cold and look
for refuge in this holy monastery.

GATE KEEPER

You! Servants of God! Roaming the
streets at night? You're crooks and
villains. Off with you!

LEO

Have you no pity, Brother
Doorkeeper? Are you going to let
us die of cold? If you believe in
Christ, give us shelter, a piece of
bread. We're Christians, take pity!

There is a rough opening of the door.

GATE KEEPER

Now you asked for it, you wretches.
I'll give you the thrashing you
deserve.

While speaking he emerges with his staff. He stumbles,
appears drunk. He pushes Francis to the ground. Leo
intervenes.

FRANCIS

Bear it like a man, Brother
Leo. Don't resist! Don't oppose
God's will.

The gate keeper strikes Francis.

FRANCIS

Strike Brother Doorkeeper! You are
my salvation.

The gate keeper is mystified by Francis, he looks at Leo.

GATE KEEPER

Your turn now, scoundrel!

Leo lifts his staff.

FRANCIS

Brother Leo, in God's name, do not resist!

LEO

I should let him kill me!? No!

Leo gets ready to swing.

FRANCIS

Brother Leo, if you love me, do not resist. God commanded him to thrash us.

Leo throws his staff down, crosses his arms.

LEO

Strike door keeper. And may the wrath of God deal with you!

The Gate keeper laughs, knocks Leo down and pushes him with Francis into a hay stack. He returns to the Monastery. They are wet, beaten, cold. Huddled together to keep warm.

FRANCIS

Do you know what this is Brother Leo?

LEO

(exasperated)
No... don't say it.

FRANCIS

Perfect joy!

LEO

Perfect joy! I beg your pardon, but it sounds like perfect impudence!

Leo pushes away from Francis

LEO

God presents man with food to eat, fire to keep us warm, and wine to drink... and our answer is NO!

FRANCIS

Leo, God opens his arms and tells
the human heart to come.

Leo rolls his eyes in despair...

FRANCIS

The heart says no to the small,
insignificant joys, in order to
reach the great YES!

LEO

What! Then why did God create the
Earth's riches and set such a
banquet before us.

Francis smiles and pats Leo gently on the back.

FRANCIS

To test our stamina.

Leo pulls slightly away, puts his head down.

LEO

What's the use of arguing. Let me
sleep. Perhaps I'll dream of a
warm bakery!

The companions fall asleep outside the Monastery door.

EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE MONASTERY - DAY

As morning comes the Gate Keeper awakens from his drunk of
the night before. He holds his head and has a flashback to
the beating.

He looks through the gate door and sees them. He steps out,
gently tries to waken them.

GATE KEEPER

Brothers, brothers, it's morning.

Francis wakes up and a smile comes to his face. Leo looks
up with fright and is ready to hide again. The gate keeper
slumps to the ground as he speaks.

GATE KEEPER

Brothers, forgive me, forgive me.
I'd lost my wife, my child, my
hope. All killed by a fire....
Drowned my sorrows in wine,
frustrations fighting.

Francis moves closer.

FRANCIS

Unburden yourself, we are all ears,
fill us.

GATE KEEPER

I'd hope coming here would help.
Maybe just to escape. Father
Martin, our holy abbot, had a
premonition. Made me gate keeper
last night.

Leo becomes more at ease.

GATE KEEPER

I got tired. I got drunk.

Tears come to his eyes.

GATE KEEPER

You didn't fight back... you didn't
fight back... even drunk, I
remembered that.

Francis embraces him.

FRANCIS

Share in our discovery. You lost
your family, but their spirits are
immortal! Look around... the
message of Christ... we are all
brothers and sisters.

They stand and enter the Monastery.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Francis and Leo journey toward Assisi. It is late in the
day. They stop to rest in the middle of a flowered field,
under a large tree.

LEO

Thank God, we're making good
time. We should be back in Assisi
by tomorrow.

Francis looks around.

FRANCIS

Paradise must be just like
this. Nothing more. This is
enough, and more than enough.

Birds return to the tree to roost before evening. They chirp loudly.

FRANCIS

Look, the birds come home. Rest their heads on their breasts. Night is falling. They don't know if day will ever return. But they sleep in peace.

Leo looks up as if seeing the birds for the first time. Opens his mouth, but Francis motions to stay silent. Francis stands and addresses the birds.

FRANCIS

Sister birds, God, the Father of birds and men, loves you greatly and you are aware of this.

The chirping quiets. Birds collect on branches facing Francis. He raises his arms and flaps them slowly.

FRANCIS

In the morning you fill yourselves with song. When your nests have eggs you mothers keep them warm. God becomes a male bird, sits on the branch opposite, and sings to ease your labor.

There is perfect quiet in the tree. Each little eye is on Francis. He raises his hand to bless them.

FRANCIS

Evenings come my brothers and sisters. Time to sleep. As you dream, may you see Our Lady of the Birds flying above your nests.

Night falls in peace.

EXT. ASSISI - DAY

Francis and Leo return to the streets of Assisi for the first time after he stripped and left. Francis is muddy, hair tangled, dirty robes and worn sandals.

Francis leads as they walk down a narrow alley. He suddenly stops and falls against a wall.

LEO

What's wrong, what happened?

Clara, with an older NURSE, approaches dressed in simple white. Her hair hangs plainly. A dry and wrinkled rose is pinned to her dress, gold crucifix still around her neck.

She halts as she sees him. Almost begins to reverse her path, but then decides to move forward.

CLARA

Aren't you ashamed?

Francis barely makes eye contact.

FRANCIS

Ashamed? In front of whom?

CLARA

Your father, your mother, me? Why do you do what you do? Shout what you shout? Dance like a carnival acrobat? Why!

Francis lowers his head. Does not answer. Clara's eyes tear.

CLARA

(softly)

I feel sorry for you. When I think of you my heart breaks.

FRANCIS

(almost inaudible)

And mine... when I think of you.

Clara hears the words. Her face becomes joyful, eager.

CLARA

Francis, you... you think of me?

Francis pauses, looks up. Their eyes meet. He blinks.

FRANCIS

(strongly)

No, never! Let's be on our way
Brother Leo.

Francis wants to move by, but Clara is shocked. Her shoulders become square, blocks the path, stands her ground.

CLARA

Accursed is he who acts contrary to
the will of God! Who preaches we
should not marry, have children,
build a home. Who says men should
not be real men, loving wine, women
and glory!

Francis drops his head, shoulders droop, looks down. Leo is behind Francis listening. His head nods in agreement as Clara delivers her speech.

She pauses, looks at Francis. His head is still down, there is no response.

CLARA

(more softly)

Forgive me for telling you this my
poor Francis. But that's what it
means to be truly human.

The nurse puts her arm around Clara to pull her away.

NURSE

Come, my child. People will see.

Clara turns, she bursts into tears and walks away. Francis is frozen, still looks at the ground.

Clara stops, turns around, tears the dead rose from her dress and throws it at Francis.

CLARA

Take it! Take it as a remembrance
of me! As a remembrance of the
world!

The rose lands at his feet. He doesn't move. Clara looks at her nurse.

CLARA

We'll leave. It's over now.

They move off. Francis keeps his head down. After a few moments.

FRANCIS

(softly)

Is she gone?

LEO

Yes, gone.

Leo picks up the rose.

FRANCIS

(startled)

No, don't touch it! Leave it! On the side of the path. So it won't be trampled.

Leo bends and slowly puts the rose down. A tear come to his eye.

FRANCIS

(forcefully)

Let's go, be quick! Prepare to ring the bell! Good God! To marry, have children, build a home... I spit on them all!

Leo stands, faces Francis directly.

LEO

(haltingly)

Alas this day Brother Francis... but I believe... forgive me for thinking so... I believe the girl is right. A true human being --

FRANCIS

(cuts him off)

-- A true human being is someone who surpasses what is human! That's what I say.

A tear falls on his face as his speech slows, grows softer. Leo opens his mouth. Francis reaches out, covers his lips.

FRANCIS

(softly)

I implore you Brother Leo. Please. Be quiet.

Francis sinks down to the ground, his back against a wall. Leo sits down beside him. They are separated by the dead rose. Francis picks it up.

FRANCIS

Leo, I still love her. Can she be right? Have I lost my way?

His head drops.

FRANCIS

Lord... what pain I've caused her. Am I on the wrong path?

He puts the rose back down very slowly.

FRANCIS

Forgive me, tonight we separate. I need some time. Perhaps I'll visit Bernard as he asked.

INT. ASSISI BAR - NIGHT

Bernard and Giles sit closely at an almost empty bar.

BERNARD

Not quite the same without Francis?

GILES

Yes, I still can't believe it. But he'll be back.

BERNARD

Back?

GILES

Yes, this is just another fad. Another show. He may even believe it. But he'll be back.

BERNARD

No... no. Not this time.

GILES

What makes you so sure?

BERNARD

I'll tell you. I invited him to my home.

GILES

(surprised)

Really? He came?

BERNARD

Yes. Yesterday. He slept in the next room.

Bernard halts, looks around, lowers his voice.

BERNARD

Okay, you've got to keep this a secret. On your word.

Giles, sits back, pauses.

GILES
You have it.

CUTAWAY: NIGHT, THE HOME OF BERNARD.

Francis and Bernard say goodnight. He leaves Francis in a room by himself. His voice narrates the action.

BERNARD (V.O.)
I made a small hole in the wall earlier so I could see him. I said goodnight, he acted as if he was tired, would sleep.

GILES (V.O.)
And...?

BERNARD (V.O.)
I went to bed, snored loudly. Then I got up and watched. He was on his knees, praying.

GILES (V.O.)
Praying?

BERNARD (V.O.)
Not just a little, all night. Just a few words over and over: My Lord and My God.

GILES (V.O.)
All night?

BERNARD (V.O.)
Yes, in the morning, I made noise as if awakening. He climbed into bed and faked sleep.

RETURN TO SCENE

Bernard takes a good look at his friend. Pauses.

BERNARD
I'll tell you, it made me think.

GILES
I'll tell you what I think. He's crazy! All this God stuff! He'll recover.

BERNARD
Perhaps, perhaps.

EXT. ASSISI SQUARE - DAY

Leo rings the ram's bell. Francis yells and skips.

FRANCIS

My friends, stop what you're
doing. Come and hear the new
madness!

People gather. Leo hides himself from imagined rocks, but they do not come. He looks around surprised. The crowd is different, no yelling or laughing.

Francis approaches the square, Sir Bernadone is in his path. Bernadone has not seen him. Francis hesitates, looks for another route. Leo takes him by the arm.

LEO

Courage. This is the path you have
chosen.

Bernadone turns and sees him. His face tightens. He blinks hard and moves quickly toward Francis.

CUTAWAY: FATHER SILVESTER

Silvester, sees the coming conflict, moves toward the pair, then halts, turns back.

FATHER SILVESTER

(to himself)

Why get involved. Let them settle
their own affairs.

RETURN:

Francis stands straight, next to Leo, faces Bernadone.

FRANCIS

Sir Bernadone. This is my
father. He gives me a blessing
while you give me a curse.

Francis kisses the hand of Leo.

Bernadone stops, sweat on his forehead, and tears in his eyes. He falters, leans against his staff for support.

SIR BERNADONE

(choking out the words)

What of your mother? Have you
forgot. She cries for you. Come
home, let her see you.

Francis pauses, surprised. Looks down for a moment and then speaks more softly to his father.

FRANCIS

I must ask God first.

SIR BERNADONE

What! Ask God? What kind of God would stop you from seeing your mother?

FRANCIS

I don't know. Let me ask him.

Francis turns and walks away. Leo looks at Bernadone, now in tears, head down. He pats him on the arm briefly, turns slowly, and follows Francis.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Leo follows Francis through the woods. The wind is blowing. Their hair is tangled, robes mud splattered. Leo takes a deep breath, shakes his head, and stops.

LEO

Francis, I'm sorry, I'm flesh and blood. I can't keep this up.

Francis turns to look at his erupting companion.

LEO

I can't take it anymore! The back and forth. The hunger, the cold... the loneliness.

Leo's voice grows softer, an eye tears.

LEO

This may be fine for you. You almost died. This is your second life and you're setting an example of faith and love for others. But what about me?

Francis opens his mouth. Leo holds his hands up.

LEO

No! Be quiet. Listen. This is my only life. What if we're wrong about the spirit, about God?

Leo grabs Francis by the shoulders, looks into his eyes.

LEO

What if... what if what lies beyond
is nothing. Only an empty
abyss. I won't throw my only life
away!

Leo pushes Francis, turns quickly, and walks away. Francis stands alone in the dark woods. He sighs, his head falls, slowly turns away.

CUTAWAY: A FRIENDLY BAR

An inn with a roaring fire and happy people. Leo sits back. Enjoys the company and the warm fire, listens to singing. A waitress approaches Leo.

WAITRESS

Sir, may I help you?

LEO

Bring me bread, wine, and meat! On
the double, I'm starved!

WAITRESS

Yes sir, right away.

She brings the food. He grins and devours the meat. Juice dribbles from his lips and down his beard. He winks at one of the girls, grabs the wine, and calls to the Waitress.

LEO

And if Francis, the son of
Bernadone comes and asks if you've
seen Leo, tell him no.

The waitress bends over and looks at him closely. Touches his face.

WAITRESS

Leo, Leo, do you hear me?

BACK TO REALITY

Leo shakes his head and sees Francis. They stand in front of a cave.

FRANCIS

Leo, what happened? While we
walked you appeared deep in
meditation of the mystery of
Christ, the kingdom of God.

LEO
 (quietly)
 Yes... yes... quite right. I was
 thinking of the Kingdom of God. I
 had entered paradise.

A smile spreads across Leo's face. Francis looks at the
 cave entrance.

FRANCIS
 Leo, quiet is required to hear the
 voice of God. I will remain here
 three days, please leave me.

Francis reaches out and grasps his arm.

FRANCIS
 And Brother Leo, the path has been
 hard. Thank you for your faith,
 your loyalty... till we meet again.

Leo walks away, shakes his head, talks to himself.

LEO
 Confound it Leo. You have chosen
 this path, stick to it... I hope!

EXT. ASSISI - DAY

A series of brief vignettes as Leo wanders through Assisi,
 gathering alms. People feel safer approaching him than
 Francis. Old friends ask how he is doing.

BERNARD
 Brother Leo, I worry about him.
 Invite him to my home again.

Leo encounters Lady Pica. She looks around at an empty
 street and then approaches him closely.

LADY PICA
 Brother Leo, how is my son? Tell
 me honestly. I can bear it.

LEO
 He's in a cave. Praying.

LADY PICA
 Will he visit? My husband sobs in
 his sleep. He's heartbroken.

LEO
I don't know. We'll wait and see.

Lady Pica hesitates. She looks around, moves closer to Leo.

LADY PICA
(softly)
And, and... his mind?

Leo's eyes open in surprise at the question. He looks squarely at her.

LEO
My Lady, your son is jumping the stairs one by one. His spirit is climbing. It's an eruption within him and he sees the world of the flesh crumbling.

Leo stands straighter.

LEO
His mind, I swear to you by the soul I shall render up to God, is clear, sound, and unshaken.

A broad smile breaks out on Lady Pica's face. She sighs in relief.

LADY PICA
Glory be. I can ask for nothing else. I'm satisfied.

She looks at shabby Leo.

LADY PICA
And you? Let me fill your sack. How about some warm clothes? Will he wear them?

LEO
No, no. He says he wears God next to his skin and stays warm.

LADY PICA
And you?

LEO
Ah, and me... I'd like to, but I can't. I'd be ashamed.

LADY PICA
Ashamed? In front of whom?

Leo pauses.

LEO
I don't know. Maybe Francis, maybe
myself, maybe even God... anyway,
this is the path I've chosen.

LADY PICA
Very well. Tell him my wish is for
him to succeed in what I was unable
to do. He has my blessing.

EXT. CAVE - DAY

Leo arrives at the cave, worried. Francis is not visible.
The food is untouched. Leo paces back and forth.

Francis emerges, looks refreshed, confident. He smiles.

FRANCIS
Well, Brother Leo, are you ready?

He looks at Leo's worn out robe and sandals.

FRANCIS
Good! I see you're wearing your
armor and boots. Ready for the
campaign!

Leo's mouth hangs open, he blinks, looks at himself.

FRANCIS
People have enumerated many words
for God, but I shall add
more: Bottomless Abyss, the
Insatiable, the Merciless, the
Unsatisfied. He who never says
enough!

Leo backs up from his fiery friend, but Francis approaches
closer, inches away.

FRANCIS
Not enough! That's what he said
Brother Leo.

LEO
What more can he expect. Didn't
you repair the Church of San
Damiano?

FRANCIS
Not enough!

LEO
Didn't you abandon mother and
father?

FRANCIS
Not enough!

LEO
Didn't you kiss the leper on the
lips!

FRANCIS
Not enough!

Leo pauses for a moment. Stares at his friend.

LEO
All right, then what? What does he
want?

FRANCIS
We must go to the little Church of
Santa Maria de Angeli.

LEO
I know it, they call it the
Portiuncula. Abandoned in the
woods. Why there?

Francis doesn't answer, just turns and walks away. Leo gives a quizzical look, shrugs his shoulders, and follows.

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

Leo and Francis approach a small, abandoned Church in a grove of trees. In front is a beautiful flowering tree. No other buildings.

Francis and Leo cross themselves.

FRANCIS
This is it! Santa Maria de Angeli,
our home.

Francis approaches the tree, caresses the trunk.

FRANCIS
Blessed is the hand that planted
you. The seed that gave you birth.

They enter. The weathered, wooden doors barely hang on the hinges. A statue of Madonna and Child surrounded by angels is near the altar, dusty, trapped by spider webs.

On the altar is a book of the Gospels, open in the middle. Francis get's excited, grabs Leo's arm, points.

FRANCIS

Look! There's our sign! Go and read the verses. Read loudly, that again the Church may be filled with the sound of his word.

Leo crosses himself and hesitantly approaches the altar. Puts his finger down and reads with a clear voice.

CLOSE UP: ZOOMING IN ON THE ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT. THE DIRTY FINGER FOLLOWS THE TEXT.

LEO (V.O.)

Go forth preaching, saying the Kingdom of God is at hand. Take no gold, no silver in your belts, no sack for your journey. No sandals, no staff --

There is a yell from Francis. He speaks quickly.

FRANCIS

-- Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Lord, thy will be done. Only our eyes, hands, feet! Our mouths will proclaim the Kingdom of God.

Francis rushes up, grabs Leo by the arm and pulls him outside. Francis drops his staff and kicks off his sandals. He looks at Leo.

FRANCIS

Didn't you hear? Throw away your staff, your sandals.

Leo slowly complies. He still holds the sack with provisions. Reluctantly, he looks at Francis.

LEO

This too?

FRANCIS

What, the sack! Didn't you hear, no sack!

Leo hesitates and then drops it.

LEO

God expects a great deal. Why does
he behave so inhumanely toward us.

Francis softens and has a warm smile. He touches Leo.

FRANCIS

(softly)

Because he loves us.

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

Francis sits alone under the flowering tree near the
Church. Bernard approaches quietly and sits by his side.

FRANCIS

Welcome Bernard, what wind brings
you here?

BERNARD

A thought has been tormenting me
Father Francis. Take pity on me
and soothe my heart.

FRANCIS

I'm listening Brother Bernard. Not
I, but God, will soothe you.

Bernard pauses, his head is down as he speaks.

BERNARD

A great nobleman gave me treasure
to keep. I've guarded it many
years, but now I plan to go on a
long journey. What should I do
with his treasure?

He looks at Francis, their eyes meet.

FRANCIS

You should return it. And who is
this great nobleman?

BERNARD

Christ. All my wealth I owe to
Him. How can I return it?

Francis' head goes down, then Bernard's. There is a pause.
Francis stands, offers a hand, and pulls up Bernard.

FRANCIS

I don't know, let's go and ask.

They walk toward the Church and see Brother Leo talking to someone.

BERNARD

I know him, it's Sir Pietro. He went to Bologna and became a professor.

Leo points to the direction of Francis and Bernard, they all meet.

SIR PIETRO

Bernard, a surprise to see you. Francis, forgive me for the interruption.

FRANCIS

And what brings you here?

Pietro is nervous, gives a heavy sigh.

PIETRO

Death. The untimely death of my best student. A young man full of promise and hope.

Francis touches Pietro's arm.

FRANCIS

Join us, we will go and pray for his soul.

Francis turns toward the Church, but Pietro stops him.

PIETRO

Please wait, there's more, much more. I feel responsible... I must unburden my heart.

Francis looks at the others, opens his arms.

FRANCIS

Brothers, let's sit down. Share your burden.

The groups sits in the grass. Pietro looks at the others.

CUTAWAY: THE BEDSIDE SCENE IN BOLOGNA

Pietro leans over the death bed of his student Francesco.

PIETRO

Francesco, my child, if God decides to call you near him. I have a favor to ask.

FRANCESCO

What favor, Father. I'll do whatever you desire.

PIETRO

I want you to visit me in my dreams. Tell me what goes on in the other world.

Francesco looks up at Pietro and grabs his hand.

FRANCESCO

I shall come....

His eyes close, his hand releases the grip and falls.

RETURN TO SCENE

Pietro's head is down. He is choked with emotion.

PIETRO

And yesterday morning... he came.

The other friends look up, focus on him. Silence. Bernard reaches out to him.

BERNARD

Courage Pietro, tell us.

DREAM - PIETRO IS VISITED

Pietro is at his desk. Through the door comes a figure wrapped like a mummy. The wrappings are strips of paper covered with writing.

The figure moves slowly, dragging legs, burdened. As a wind blows through the window, the papers move out of the way, just a skeleton is visible.

PIETRO

Francesco, is it you? What is all this? These papers that stop you from walking?

FRANCESCO

I only have a few moments... I cannot ascend... they weigh me down. I cannot see.

PIETRO

But the papers, why? What are they?

FRANCESCO

All I wrote on philosophy. My analysis of the Gospels. My discourses on metaphysics, the nature of the soul.

The masked head drops. We hear sobbing.

PIETRO

But why, you knew so much, you worked so hard!

FRANCESCO

But I failed to love, failed to see the Divine around me and in me...

BACK TO SCENE

Pietro shakes his head. He sweats from the brow.

PIETRO

This morning, before I left, I took all my papers, my books... and burned them.

They all look at him.

PIETRO

Blessings on my student who saved me. My new life begins. Glory be to God!

BERNARD

And what have you decided? What is this new life?

PIETRO

(hesitates)

I'm not quite sure... I'm still learning to see.

Francis stands up. Looks at Bernard and Pietro

FRANCIS

I know! Come with me, both of you.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The group stands before the altar. The book of the Gospels is closed. Francis kneels, crosses himself, and steps behind the altar.

FRANCIS

Brothers, listen with your hearts.

The others watch as he randomly opens the book and places his finger on a page. He lowers his head to read.

FRANCIS

If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

He closes the book, repeats the sequence.

FRANCIS

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow.

He closes the book, looks at the brothers.

FRANCIS

Do you have your answer Brother Bernard, should I read more?

Bernard shakes his head.

FRANCIS

Brother Pietro, the new life you seek. Do you see the way?

Pietro nods. A smile comes to Francis and then to the others. Francis grasps them both under his arms as they walk out.

FRANCIS

Sir Pietro, you've done what Christ commanded. You've forsaken books and found Faith. Now, it's your turn Brother Bernard.

Bernard, smiles, looks at the others.

BERNARD

Yes, I know what to do.

INT. CLOTHING SHOP - DAY

Bernard arrives at the door to his shop. He takes his key, opens the door wide and tosses the key over his shoulder.

BERNARD

Whoever is poor! Whoever is
unclothed! Come! In the name of
Christ, I'm distributing all my
goods!

He goes into the store, Francis follows. People come in.

MONTAGE - BERNARD GIVE AWAY

-- Bernard happily cuts material, Francis helps.

-- Jokes with the poor customers.

-- People leave smiling, arrive home with surprises.

BACK TO SCENE

FRANCIS

Good thing I'm in the clothing
business and know how to cut cloth!

Bernard looks at the painting of his father and smiles.

BERNARD

What a joy! What a relief!

Francis goes out to look for more people. Father Silvester watches the event from across the street. He looks at Francis.

FATHER SILVESTER

What a shame that such wealth
should go to waste!

Francis pauses, looks at the happy people in the shop, looks back at Fr. Silvester.

FRANCIS

You remember what Christ
said. Forgive me if I remind you.
Want to be perfect? Distribute what
you have to the poor and follow.

Silvester turns red in the face, holds back his anger, and storms away.

Francis pauses and then runs after him, taps him on the shoulder. Silvester turns to face him.

FRANCIS
 Father Silvester! I reminded you
 of Christ's word.

He kneels down.

FRANCIS
 Forgive me. You, who hold Christ
 in your hands, know those words
 better than I.

Francis bows his head.

FRANCIS
 Father, forgive me for my outburst.

Silvester looks down at Francis, touches the bowed head with his hands, pauses, blinks hard, and turns. Tears come to his eyes as he stumbles away.

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

The group of followers has grown to about a dozen. The friars and a typical day.

MONTAGE - WORK OF THE FRIARS

- Gathering branches, making a place to live, dirt floor.
- Singing in prayer together
- Going door-to-door asking for alms. Entering churches to sweep the aisles, cleaning.
- Private meditation in the woods.
- Taking care of a community of Lepers, washing them.
- Francis speaks to them of God and Love. Hear him preach on the two main commandants, "Love God, Love your neighbor"

BACK TO SCENE

Sabatino approaches Francis. Francis smiles as they embrace in greeting.

SABATINO
 Francis, a cousin of mine hails
 from Gubbio. A wolf is killing
 their sheep. They ask you to visit
 and pray with them for relief.

Francis claps Sabatino on the back.

FRANCIS

Yes, of course. I've heard it's a quiet village, the walk there will do me good.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Francis walks through the woods alone, carrying a bag. He calls out repeatedly.

FRANCIS

Brother Wolf, Brother Wolf, please hear me! I have a message from the villagers.

Eventually a large WOLF emerges ahead of Francis, hackles raised and growling. Francis opens his arms and continues to walk closer.

FRANCIS

Brother Wolf, how happy I am to see you. I mean you no harm and bring a gift.

As Francis continues to speak the hackles drop, the teeth are hidden, the wolf watches.

Francis stops a few yards away and pulls meat from the bag and tosses it toward the wolf. He sits down, palms open. The wolf sniffs, but does not eat, eyes focused on Francis.

FRANCIS

Brother Wolf, you must stop killing the sheep. The villagers are unable to feed their children. Please move on.

The wolf nears, their eyes lock, become one pair.

WOLF (V.O.)

Do not destroy God's prescribed order. Sheep feed on grass, wolves feed on sheep. That has been ordained. Do not ask why.

FRANCIS (V.O)

But the villagers, their families.

A female wolf emerges from the woods with two cute pups in tow. As the dialog continues, the pups approach Francis, he cuddles them in his lap.

WOLF (V.O.)

Yes, my family. Your holiness must know we also pray... Our Father, who reigns over the forest and has commanded us to eat meat. Thy will be done.

FRANCIS(V.O.)

Yes... yes.

WOLF (V.O.)

And when I die, Lord, may I be resurrected and rejoice, along with the sheep, and glorify you.

Francis' head drops, he looks down. The she wolf and pups move away, she drags the meat into the forest.

INT. CLARA HOME - DAY

The family is at dinner. Madam Scifi glares at her husband, who looks down at his plate.

MADAM SCIFI

I don't care what you say, it's just lunacy! Abandoning an inheritance, giving away your hard earned property, your prestige as a professor. Scandalous! Just, just, disgraceful!

Count Scifi keeps his head bowed while Clara looks at her mother. Madam ignores her husband and turns toward her daughter.

MADAM SCIFI

And you! I know how you feel about this, this... Francis! You are pining away after a fool!

This time Clara keeps direct eye contact and speaks with slow, measured words.

CLARA

No. No. I know he's gone to me.

Sabatino puts down his food, looks at Clara.

SABATINO

Clara, don't give up hope. A playboy doesn't become a Saint so quickly. I'll bring him back.

Clara looks at him, questioning. Sabatino picks up a large roasted pork rib and waves it like a baton.

SABATINO

I'll take a bottle of wine, some tender pork to wet his appetite. Get him drunk and wrap a noose around his neck. He'll dance for me like a trained bear!

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

Francis talks to the friars, the words are not audible. Hidden nearby, Sabatino listens with pork and wine in hand.

As Francis speaks the expression on Sabatino's face changes, becomes somber.

He emerges from the woods and kneels in front of Francis.

SABATINO

Forgive me Father Francis. Just a few days ago I wagered I could make you drunk, slip a noose around your neck, and bring you back to the Piazza and have you dance.

A smile comes to Francis. He claps Sabatino on the back.

FRANCIS

And why not! Everyone will be there today. You clap your hands and I'll dance. Let's go!

The two walk off. Pietro and Leo remain.

PIETRO

Leo, do you think he'll dance?

LEO

Without a doubt Brother Pietro, without a doubt.

PIETRO

Buy why? I'd be so ashamed.

EXT. ASSISI SQUARE - DAY

Sabatino and Francis enter the square. Clara watches from the same window where they earlier heard Francis sing. Her sister Anna is with her.

Francis dances around Sabatino, who holds the rope in the center of the circle and claps. The two girls smile to each other.

After a few moments Sabatino stops. Francis, pulls the noose from his neck and wraps it around Sabatino. He dances around Francis.

The crowd becomes quiet. Has Sabatino become infected by the new madness? People whisper.

Francis and Sabatino dance together, link arms.

Clara loses her smile, becomes serious, she turns away from the window. Anna is confused by the sight.

ANNA

I don't understand, Sabatino, what happened to him? We were planning to be married.

CLARA

So, you don't understand dear sister. How's it feel now?

They both look again outside, both men singing, smiling, laughing. Anna begins to breakdown, tears form. Clara puts her arms around her.

ANNA

I've lost him. Francis, how did he do it? What magic does he know. How can Sabatino love him so?

Clara let's go of her sister, laughs.

CLARA

No, no, no. You've got it all wrong, it's not Francis.

They put their heads together. Clara whispers into Anna's ear.

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

Francis and Sabatino happily come back to the Church.

FRANCIS

Brothers! He made me dance, but
then we both danced.

SABATINO

I've never felt better!

FRANCIS

It is one thing to dance by
yourself, quite another when there
are two, then three, thirty,
thirty-thousand.!

Sabatino spins around.

SABATINO

And then.... all of mankind, and
after that the animals and birds...
and then the trees and mountains!

Francis opens his arms.

FRANCIS

All creation dancing before the
Creator.

SABATINO

(laughing)

Don't give me any other job! I
shall dance for all eternity!

Francis takes Sabatino by his side, both are smiling.

FRANCIS

Welcome our new Brother Sabatino to
our Company!

Sabatino's face is serious. He looks at Francis.

SABATINO

I remember, the roast pork and
wine?

FRANCIS

We are celebrating your
birthday. Bring them out and let's
eat and drink. God forgives if we
are unfaithful now and then.

Sabatino goes into the woods and returns. Francis takes the bottle and pours the wine.

FRANCIS

To brother Sabatino! Today he weds
Lady Poverty! Let's drink to the
happy couple!

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

The friars are interrupted as Fr. Silvester approaches.

FRANCIS

How splendid to see you Father
Silvester. You've caught us at a
joyful time. What wind brings you
to our shanty?

FATHER SILVESTER

The wind of God. Your words have
been flames, they entered, burned,
and cleansed my heart!

FRANCIS

(quietly, more solemn)
Not my words, those of Christ...

FATHER SILVESTER

Yes, but from you I heard them for
the first time. In the past, they
were just letters, so much
noise. You, you, brought them to
life.

Francis steps back and looks at Silvester closely.

FRANCIS

You are welcome here, but what is
that bundle you carry?

Silvester sheepishly looks down at what he is holding.

FATHER SILVESTER

Just a few personal things, a few
clothes, some books, sandals.

FRANCIS

Come with me, we shall walk down
the road and give your bundle to
the first poor man we see.

INT. VATICAN - NIGHT

SUPER: "Rome - the Vatican"

A bedroom behind a door that has golden keys. The Pope is restless, turns as he sleeps. His voice says, "no... no".

DREAM - INSIDE A HUGE CHURCH.

The structure shakes. Columns vibrate and the Pope is panicked. He runs up and down the aisles. Attempts to restore statues and crosses as they fall to the ground.

A darkly robed monk enters, touches the columns. Suddenly, there is calm. The Pope turns and looks at the monk. The face is not visible to us.

POPE INNOCENT

Who? Who are you?

The monk does not answer, turns away.

BACK TO SCENE

The Pope awakens in his royal bed, sweating.

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

Bright green wooded hillside. Francis and Leo sit together. The sun sets. Some of the other friars can be seen working in the background.

FRANCIS

Leo, these men. They look to me. They've given up their lives. But me, at times I wonder... Clara...

FLASHBACK: THE EARLIER ENCOUNTER WITH CLARA

CLARA

(softly)

I feel sorry for you. When I think of you my heart breaks.

FRANCIS

(almost inaudible)

And mine... when I think of you.

Clara hears the words. Her face becomes joyful, eager.

CLARA

Francis, you... you think of me?

BACK TO SCENE

He touches Leo's shoulder.

FRANCIS

Leo, I must confess. I still dream
of her. What do I do?

Francis looks down. They are both quiet.

FRANCIS

Leo, I wonder? Are we living the
truth or are we liars?

LEO

What? Liars? Why? We clean
churches, care for the lepers...
what more?

FRANCIS

I think of when I was a child. On
Good Friday all the people gathered
in the streets.

CUTAWAY: A VILLAGE ENACTS GOOD FRIDAY

A narrow street through a village. Spectators on every side
watch as an ACTOR walks carrying a cross.

FRANCIS (V.O)

The man who portrayed Christ gasped
as he carried the cross.

A cross lays on the ground. The actor lays down and
stretches out his arms.

FRANCIS (V.O)

They painted his hands red as he
was nailed down.

The cross is lifted for view of the spectators.

FRANCIS (V.O)

At the moment of death, as he
yelled, "My God! My God! Why have
you forsaken me..." The women
screamed and beat their breasts,
men sighed.

FRANCIS (V.O)

Later that day the actor came to our house for dinner. He was clean. Had washed away the paint. I didn't understand...

People sit and eat. The child Francis walks up to the jovial and well dressed actor.

FRANCIS

But you were crucified, you were killed?

ACTOR

No, no, no my boy. That was all a show. Understand? A game. I just pretended.

FRANCIS

In other words, you're a liar!!!!

The child beats at the actor with his small hands, is restrained by Lady Pica.

FRANCIS (V.O)

My mother told me to calm down, that I was too young to understand.

BACK TO SCENE

Francis stretches out his feet, looks at his hands.

FRANCIS

I'm older now? Where are the nail marks, the blood? Are we too actors Brother Leo?

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

Francis and Sir Pietro sit on the ground with some other friars. A giant of a man emerges from bushes and faces them. Elias is well dressed and carries a look of arrogance.

The eyes of Sir Pietro grow wide. Elias nods to Sir Pietro, then steps in front of Francis. Puts his hand over his heart to salute him.

ELIAS

I wish to join your order. I am Elias Bombarone, a graduate of the University of Bologna.

He looks at the other friars as if making a speech.

ELIAS

I find that books constrict me. I
want to engage in great deeds!

FRANCIS

I'm sorry. I'm not starting an
order. We're humble men gathered
to save our lives and help our
brothers. These are simple things.

Francis stands and attempts to lead Elias away.

FRANCIS

You have no business here. You who
are educated and wish to be great.

Elias pushes his hands away, turns back toward the
friars. Looks at Sir Pietro.

ELIAS

But I wish to save my soul. The
simple man, following his heart,
finds what the mind will never
discover.

Francis looks down, troubled, as he listens.

ELIAS

But, the mind is needed also. It
too is a Divine gift. We must
blend heart and mind harmoniously.

There is a pause. Francis looks up at Elias.

FRANCIS

You speak well my friend. Your
arguments are skillful. In short,
I'm afraid of you.

Francis points away.

FRANCIS

Please seek your salvation
elsewhere.

Francis sits down and looks away.

ELIAS

You have no right to drive me
away. The educated, led astray by
their minds... forget what road to
follow. I have faith in you.

Francis does not respond and continues sitting. Sir Pietro leans over and whispers into Francis' ear. Elias sits down next to him and admires the scenery.

ELIAS

What solitude! What peace!

In the background some of the other brothers return from begging, start a fire and cook.

SABATINO

The lentils are ready. Come and eat in God's name.

Francis stands. He looks around slowly and then extends his hand to Elias and pulls him up off the ground.

FRANCIS

We are glad to have you with us.

Francis brings him into the hut where the others sit on the ground.

FRANCIS

Brothers, stand and welcome Brother Elias. God has sent us new strength.

The brothers greet him and begin eating. Suddenly Francis puts down his bowl.

FRANCIS

My brothers, these lentils are delicious and the flesh is enjoying itself too much.

He scoops some ashes from the fire and mixes them into his bowl and continues eating. Elias pauses to look at him.

FRANCIS

Forgive me brothers. It's not that I'm better than you... no. My flesh is sinful and I must keep it from becoming rebellious.

ELIAS

Why should we fear our flesh so much? Don't we have faith in our spiritual strength?

FLASHBACK/RETURN: A PASSIONATE EMBRACE OF FRANCIS AND CLARA

Francis grabs another handful of ashes and throws them in his bowl.

FRANCIS
No, brother Elias, we don't!

INT. CATHEDRAL OFFICE - DAY

Francis and Leo before the Bishop. Francis' head is down.

BISHOP GUIDO
I have heard much of you, my son.
All of it good. But I have one
reason to chide you.

Francis looks up.

FRANCIS
Speak, I am listening.

BISHOP GUIDO
The faithful that follow you grow
day by day. They come into Assisi
for alms. Everyone here is
poor. How can you expect them to
continue to give?

Francis lowers his head, does not answer. The Bishop grows
more forceful.

BISHOP GUIDO
And besides, you know the
Scripture, he who does not work
should not eat.

FRANCIS
(barely audible)
We pray, we clean the churches, we
care for the people. That is work.

The Bishop doesn't seem to hear and continues.

BISHOP GUIDO
I have two requests. First, all
your followers should work as they
are able. Second, some property
should be acquired for a rainy day,
something that could be sold if the
need arose.

Francis looks up.

BISHOP GUIDO
No, not to become rich, but to
avoid becoming a burden to
(MORE)

BISHOP GUIDO (cont'd)
 others. Now, consider well, and
 give me your answer.

FRANCIS
 (starting slowly, but then
 forceful)
 A small purse to keep, a tiny
 field, a little house. Something
 to which we can say... you are mine
 against the day of need!

The bishop leans forward, becomes anxious

FRANCIS
 But he who has a house, becomes a
 door. He who has the golden ring
 finds that it turns into a noose
 and strangles him!

The bishop becomes angry, red in the face. Holds himself
 back and then speaks.

BISHOP GUIDO
 Poverty is good, up to a
 point. Wealth is good, but not to
 distraction. Moderation in all!

The Bishop looks down and grasps the crucifix that hangs
 from a chain around his neck. He fingers the body on the
 crucifix, pauses.

BISHOP GUIDO
 Even in faith, in piety.

Francis looks up, appears ready to speak. The Bishop raises
 a hand to quiet him.

BISHOP GUIDO
 The more immoderate these things
 become. The more danger of falling
 into the tempter's grasp, going
 astray. Now go, I will expect your
 answer soon.

Francis pauses, bows his head, does not speak.

EXT. CAVE - DAY

Leo and Francis walk through woods and approach a cave. The sun is setting.

Francis and Leo sit together facing the sun.

LEO

Father Francis, I'm sorry, but I've never liked Elias.

FRANCIS

I'm no administrator, no ruler. Maybe strength is needed. Perhaps Elias --

LEO

-- That man will be our Judas.

Francis' head drops, he looks at the ground as he speaks.

FRANCIS

(very softly)

Even Judas, Brother Leo... even he is a servant of God... and if he was destined to be a betrayer, it was precisely in betrayal that he did his duty.

LEO

No, that can't be. You founded this order. It was your efforts, your prayers.

FRANCIS

No, no. I may have planted a few seeds, but God waters the garden.

Francis turns to look at Leo

FRANCIS

He will decide who picks the crop.

There is silence. Leo looks at Francis more seriously, takes a deep breath before speaking.

LEO

Forgive me, what the Bishop said... It makes sense. Moderation --

FRANCIS

-- His words were knives in my heart. I was sure, but now I'm

(MORE)

FRANCIS (cont'd)
lost. I need to pray, need quiet
to hear God's voice.

Francis prepares to enter, faces Leo.

FRANCIS
Leave me Brother Leo. Come back
tomorrow morning.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Francis struggles in prayers through the night.

SERIES OF SHOTS - FRANCIS NIGHT IN THE CAVE

-- Kneeling

FRANCIS
I want to do your will, I want
to... but I can't.

-- Prostrate on the dirt.

FRANCIS
How can I save others. They don't
know, the mud within me. I want
Clara still! How can I resist?

-- Hands raised.

FRANCIS
Can you forgive me Lord? I have no
faith in this man called Francis.

-- Bowed down.

FRANCIS
When will it be enough? When can I
rest?

BACK TO SCENE

Francis stands still, head cocked, listening.

EXT. CAVE - DAY

Morning comes and Leo approaches the cave. Francis stumbles
out, falls forward. Leo grasps him in his arms, brushes the
dirt from his head.

LEO
I'm here Father Francis, don't
worry.

FRANCIS
I've been wrestling Brother Leo,
I'm tired... but ready.

LEO
All right, all right, let's go
back. The others are worried.

FRANCIS
No, not yet. You must write this
down.

INSET - WORDS FORM ON A PARCHMENT AS FRANCIS SPEAKS.

FRANCIS (V.O)
I'm not an angel, nor am I a
monkey. I'm a man, a warrior.

FRANCIS (V.O)
Each friar must work. In payment
they shall receive the necessities
of life. Never money!

FRANCIS (V.O)
If necessary, they should not be
ashamed to beg.

FRANCIS (V.O)
We must be humble. Happy when we
are among the sick, the poor, the
forgotten.

FRANCIS (V.O)
Poverty, Obedience, Chastity, and
above all Love, are our great
companions.

FRANCIS (V.O)
There is one who marches ahead,
Christ! He hungered, let us
hunger. He rejoiced in life, let
us rejoice! He suffered, let us
suffer.

FRANCIS (V.O)
He rose from the dead to life
eternal. May we also rise.

BACK TO SCENE

Francis pauses, looks at Leo, at the parchment.

FRANCIS

This is our rule. Now write at the top, to our Holy Father, Pope Innocent.

LEO

How are we going to send it to him?

FRANCIS

(laughing)

Send it? No, no, Brother Leo. We'll take it to him in person.

EXT. ASSISI - DAY

Streets of Assisi, two brothers, sack in hand, stand at a door as it slams in their faces. They turn and walk away.

BROTHER ONE

That's the fourth house this morning, nothing.

BROTHER TWO

Being a beggar, I'm not so sure this is the path.

BROTHER ONE

A path to starvation perhaps. What do we have so far?

They stop, look in the sack.

BROTHER TWO

Some crusty bread, rotten fruit.

They start to walk again.

BROTHER ONE

Well, Elias says there need to be changes.

They both rub their bellies, look at each other.

IN UNISON

Amen!

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Leo and Francis walk as dawn breaks. Birds chirp loudly.

FRANCIS

Look Leo, the monks of the bird
kingdom. See how they are dressed
in our brown!

Leo laughs.

LEO

You're right. I once visited a
Monastery where a crow had been
trained to chant the "Kyrie
Eleison." A true monk!

Francis stops, looks around and sees a fawn, a rabbit hops
through the grass. He extends his arms.

FRANCIS

Brother fawn, brother rabbit, can
you join me in worshipping our
creator?

LEO

First let's teach men... I don't
see why animals have to
learn. They don't sin.

FRANCIS

Yes, you are wise Brother Leo, only
man sins.

Leo looks at the animals near Francis, smiles.

LEO

But only we can enter eternal life.

Francis pauses at this, looks at the animals. They approach
him, nestle at his feet. He spreads his arms.

FRANCIS

Don't be too sure, Brother Leo. No
one knows the full extent of God's
mercy.

MONTAGE - JOURNEY

-- Francis and Leo walking through the woods.

-- Huddled together sleeping in a barn.

-- Door to door, begging. Sometimes a friendly face, sometimes a slammed door.

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

They approach a village. A family festival is in progress. Three generations are present. They all sit together enjoying food and wine. The clothes are simple.

Some gather around a bonfire and watch adults along with teenage boys and girls dance.

Francis and Leo pause.

FRANCIS

The human race is indestructible.
Look at those boys and girls.
Their faces burn with desire. They are confident.

Leo looks back and forth, confused.

LEO

Confident? About what?

A boy and girl embrace, look into each others eyes.

FRANCIS (V.O)

That even if they were the last two people on Earth. They could repopulate the entire planet!

Leo laughs, looks wistful, smiles.

LEO

What tough work that would be!

FRANCIS

They too are following their road. We by way of poverty and chastity. They by way of abundance and copulation!

LEO

(smiling to himself)
Copulation....

FRANCIS

It's been a good day. May they also be blessed. Soon we'll be in Rome.

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

A beautiful morning, lush and green, birds sing as the sun rises. There is whispering, a female voice comes from one of the simple huts where the brothers sleep.

Inside the hut a young woman and one of the brothers lay together. She tries to leave, smiles as he holds on.

WOMAN

Now, now, enough... let me go. Morning is here, I need to go before the others wake.

YOUNG BROTHER

All right, all right, but you'll come back? When will I see you.

WOMAN

You said you were getting tired of this life.

She points at the dirt floor, the walls of brush.

WOMAN

When will you leave? Come back to me. We were planning to be married... before this.

She waves her hand again toward the hut walls. The brother shakes his head, looks at the dirt floor, the walls of sticks.

INT. VATICAN - DAY

Francis and Leo sit in a beautiful hallway.

LEO

It's been three days now. They've forgotten. It would be easier to see Christ himself!

FRANCIS

Don't worry Brother Leo, patience.

A young priest approaches, looks down his nose at the dirty pair, but signals them to follow. They approach a door engraved with golden keys. Francis shows nervousness.

FRANCIS

Leo, are we serious? The Pope? What am I to say?

LEO

Courage, don't forget. Christ is sending you.

Francis gathers himself. They walk through the door, hoods over their heads. The Pope is on a throne, head down. Francis and Leo stand waiting.

The Pope sniffs and looks up. His nose wrinkles in disgust. He grasps the arm rests.

POPE INNOCENT

What a stench! What rags! Have you no shoes! Who are you?

FRANCIS

We are humble servants of God... from Assisi... holy Father.

POPE INNOCENT

What pigsty did you come from? Do you think this is the aroma of paradise? Couldn't you have washed yourselves?

Leo and Francis grow nervous. Francis tries to speak, opens his mouth, but nothing. The Pope leans forward with growing impatience.

POPE INNOCENT

What? Can't you talk! Tell me what you want!

Francis breaks down, falls to his knees.

FRANCIS

A favor your holiness. We ask a favor, a privilege?

The Pope softens a little.

POPE INNOCENT

What is it you wish?

FRANCIS

The privilege of absolute poverty.

The Pope pauses, his hands rise to handle the crucifix that hangs around his neck.

POPE INNOCENT

You ask a great deal.

FRANCIS

We wish to marry lady Poverty and
preach to the people.

POPE INNOCENT

Preach, preach what?

FRANCIS

That we are hurtling downward! To
preach lives of perfect love.

POPE INNOCENT

We do that already. This is
enough. You may go.

The Pope raises his hand in dismissal, looks away. Leo is the first to turn away, but Francis jumps up, the hood falls back from his head.

FRANCIS

Forgive me, but I'm not
going. Please hear me out --

As Francis speaks the Pope looks at him more closely, interrupts.

POPE INNOCENT

-- Monk, your face is familiar,
I've seen you somewhere... a
dream.

The Pope jumps down, grabs Francis, and drags him near a window. Stares into his face.

POPE INNOCENT

Was it you? You! The face of the
ragged monk was yours!

He pushes Francis away. Returns to his chair.

POPE INNOCENT

You! How can you save the Church?

He again grasps the crucifix that hangs from his neck. Francis and Leo look at each other, speechless.

POPE INNOCENT

(almost inaudible)

Lord, your ways are a mystery.

The Pope's head falls into his hands. Francis quietly approaches and lays the parchment at his feet.

FRANCIS

Holy Father, at your feet I have placed our Rule. Please place your seal upon it.

There is no response. They kneel, walk away.

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

Elias stands proud. He greets some new brothers, one carries a book sack.

ELIAS

Domenico! Roberto! How glad you could join me. Welcome to our order.

One of the men, ROBERTO, hesitates as he holds his sack.

ROBERTO

Good to see you my friend, but we'd heard no books allowed? That Francis wants an order based on spirit?

Elias, smiling, takes the sack from his hands.

ELIAS

Come! That was just a phase. After idealism comes reality.

As they walk they pass some of the original brothers, Bernard and Sabatino quietly sit together on the ground in contemplation.

PIETRO

And those fellows, what mysticism is that?

ELIAS

Some of the early brothers who have yet to adjust.

EXT. ROME - DAY

Brother Leo and Francis stand outside St. Peter's, admiring a fountain. A priest emerges, looks around, and comes to them. He returns their parchment.

Leo unrolls the parchment and the bottom reveals a seal of golden keys.

LEO
 Father Francis, your prayers have
 been answered!

Francis, slowly turns his head toward Leo.

FRANCIS
 I've never been more frightened.
 The finger of God has touched us...
 let us never forget that.

They turn and walk away down a busy street. A hooded figure catches sight of them from behind, runs through the crowd toward them.

FRANCIS
 Open your mind and engrave deeply
 what I'm about to say.

The running figure bumps people out of the way, grows close to them.

FRANCIS
 The body of man is a bow. God is
 the archer and the soul is the
 arrow. Understand?

The figure is within a few feet of them, still unseen.

FATHER SILVESTER
 Father Francis! Father
 Francis! Wait!

They turn and see Silvester. He is exhausted.

FRANCIS
 Father Silvester, what are you
 doing here. Why did you abandon
 the friars?

Breathing hard between phrases, he explains.

FATHER SILVESTER
 Bad news! Bad news! As long as
 you were with us, the Tempter
 prowled outside our fold. But when
 you left --

FRANCIS
 (softly)
 -- He jumped the fence and entered?

FATHER SILVESTER
 Yes, he whispered in their
 ears. He spoke to them of soft
 beds, good food, women.

FRANCIS
 And Bernard too? Pietro and
 Sabatino?

FATHER SILVESTER
 No, they went off by themselves,
 praying.

Francis pauses before asking the next question.

FRANCIS
 And Elias?

FATHER SILVESTER
 He says you're too
 strict. Absolute poverty is
 oppressive. We aren't capable of
 reaching perfect Love.

FRANCIS
 Incapable?

FATHER SILVESTER
 He wants to build churches,
 monasteries, universities. To
 conquer the world!

Francis slowly collapses to the ground. Silvester besides
 him. Tears form on his face.

FRANCIS
 What else? Be honest, spare
 nothing.

FATHER SILVESTER
 New brothers arrive each
 day, educated and
 intelligent. Forever reading thick
 manuscripts and giving
 discourses. They laugh at the
 original brothers, think us naive.

Tears come to the eyes of Silvester.

FATHER SILVESTER
 How could we resist without you?

Francis bows his head between his hands. Does not reply.
 Silvester stands back up.

FATHER SILVESTER
I've journeyed day and night. Come
quickly!

Francis wipes tears away. Looks up.

FRANCIS
It's my fault. I ceased to watch
over the flock. I'm coming.

EXT. PORTIUNCULA - DAY

Francis and Leo approach the Friary, they encounter a herder
along the way.

FRANCIS
May I ask a favor brother? Could I
have your hat, staff, and sack?

The herder looks at them quizzically.

FRANCIS
I'll get them back to you right
away. May the Lord repay you for
your kindness.

With a smile of recognition.

HERDER
Then you are the one they call
Francis of Assisi?

FRANCIS
Yes, my brother.

HERDER
Here, take them with good health!

Francis cloaks himself in the new garb. They reach the
Friary, Francis signals for Leo to wait. He knocks on the
door of the Friary.

FRANCIS
In the name of Christ! Please take
pity on an old man who's hungry.

From inside a voice is heard.

VOICE
Come in old man! Sit down by our
fire and eat.

Francis enters, head down, face concealed, and sits down near the other brothers. It's a beautiful feast.

They don't notice him. He eats, watches. He then reaches out for ashes and mixes them into his bowl.

One by one the brothers notice their founder has returned. They feel embarrassed, put their bowls down, wait for the storm to break. Francis pulls the hood back and stands.

FRANCIS

(softly, without anger)

Forgive me. When I saw this rich feast, I couldn't believe my eyes. Are these the poor monks who go door to door begging and who people think are saints?

A few choke on their food.

FRANCIS

For the love of Christ, tell me, are you the humble friars of Assisi?

There is no answer. A few leave, others reflect, approach him and fall prostrate before him asking for forgiveness.

Francis does not speak. Some of the brothers look at Elias. He finally stands up and is not apologetic.

ELIAS

Don't you recognize us? We've multiplied since you left! Open your arms and bless them!

Francis makes no response.

ELIAS

Did you see the Pope? Did he affix his seal?

FRANCIS

The seal with its two keys is here, Brother Elias. Don't be impatient. Tomorrow, God willing, I will speak. As for now, let us go inside the Church and pray the Lord affix his Seal as well.

EXT. FRIARY - DAY

A beautiful day. The friars sit in a circular clearing near the forest. Francis stands in the center. Elias stands off toward a side. A hooded figure moves quietly through the woods.

FRANCIS

Brothers! The Pope has affixed his seal. Lady Poverty, you are our wealth!

Brothers focus, listen.

FRANCIS

Lady Chastity. Purify our minds, our hearts. Help us conquer the temptations that surround us.

Francis spreads his arms and turns.

FRANCIS

And most Holy Lady Love. Widen our hearts that we may accept all animals, wild and tame; all trees, fruitful and unfruitful; all men, both good and bad.

The brothers stir, there is rumbling.

FRANCIS

We have permission to preach, but what is our message?

Heads come together, there is disagreement. Elias watches carefully.

FATHER SILVESTER

I am oldest and speak first. Listen! The world is rotten, the end near. Let us proclaim this disaster so people will fear, repent, and be saved.

Their are murmurs of assent.

SABATINO

The world isn't rotten, only the rich! We should attack our overlords, break down their castles. Resurrection of the people! That is the true meaning of the resurrection of Christ!

Heads nod in agreement. The hooded figure moves slowly closer to the edge of the clearing.

PIETRO

The people are hungry! They haven't enough strength to stand.

He turns toward Francis.

PIETRO

Father Francis, let's forget heaven for a moment and pay attention to the Kingdom of Earth. It too is God's creation. We must start here!

There is more assent, cheers. An emotional Bernard stands and takes his place to speak. He is sobbing, the circle grows quiet.

BROTHER BERNARD

Let us depart. How can we contend with the world's rulers? Let us take refuge in the wilderness and dedicate ourselves to prayer. It is all powerful and heard by God.

Heads are seen nodding. Francis stands and embraces Bernard.

The hooded figure crouches down at the edge of the clearing. Most of the face obscured, but the eyes focus intently on Francis.

FRANCIS

(loudly)

Love! Love! This is the way my brothers!

FRANCIS

(softly)

Not war, not force. Even prayer alone is not enough. We must do good. We must live in the world where people suffer.

He moves through the brothers, looks them in the eye.

FRANCIS

Deep down in everyone sleeps a horrible, unclean larvae. We must lean over and whisper: I love you. It shall sprout wings and become a butterfly!

Elias is restless. Francis taps his heart with his hand, then raises it to the sky as if holding an invisible sword.

FRANCIS

Love is not unarmed, but also
wields a sword!

Elias jumps to the middle. Towers over Francis and speaks quickly.

ELIAS

Don't listen to him! Love isn't
enough. What's needed is war! The
cross in one hand, the battle-ax in
the other. The only way to conquer
the powerful is to become more
powerful!

Francis lowers his head.

ELIAS

Perhaps you have forgotten,
Francis. Christ took a whip and
drove out all those that bought and
sold in God's temple! Our chief
must be a lion, not a lamb!

Several of the younger friars leap up with cheers, raise Elias up in their arms.

FRIARS

You are the lion! Step in
front! Lead us!

There is discord, people divide into groups, yelling. Francis walks through the crowd, embraces Elias, brings him to the center.

The hooded figure stands and emerges from the forest, moves through the brothers and toward Francis.

FRANCIS

Brother Elias, all of you.
Listen! Allow these arguments to
settle within and be
tranquil. Time will show us the
path.

The friars quiet down.

FRANCIS

We will disperse! Go! Plow the
Earth and plant the seeds of

(MORE)

FRANCIS (cont'd)
poverty, love, and peace. Do not
say 'me', but 'you' first.

Francis notices the figure approaching, but continues to speak.

FRANCIS
Then we will gather and all learn
from our travels. Good bye!

The figure stops a few feet from Francis. His eyes grow wide in recognition. The figure pulls back a hood. It is Clara.

Her long hair gleams in the sunlight. All eyes focus on her. Faces are in shock. There is silence.

CLARA
I wish to join your order.

FADE OUT:

THE END