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"Snappy, surprising, stimulating, and altogether satisfying."

-Backstage

Machiavelli



Comedy by Richard Vetere

"A romp ... whimsical. A firbrand of Florence, in fact, Machiavelli was just the prototype of modern power politics. He sought to serve the republic of Florence by any means possible...no more nefarious than any competent lobbyist, spin doctor or politician working in Washington today." -*New York Times*

Machiavelli

Comedy. By Richard Vetere.

Cast: 4m., 2w. Set in Florence, Italy, in 1524, *Machiavelli* is a comedy about the famous political thinker, Niccolo Machiavelli, who wrote *The Prince*. The play is told in a farcical style based on Machiavelli's own play, *The Mandrake*. When the Medicis take control of Florence, Machiavelli is imprisoned and tortured and faces certain death. Working with his politically savvy wife, Marietta Corsini, Machiavelli does all he can do to circumvent the fickle and dangerous Giuliano de' Medici and his brutal war-loving nephew, Lorenzo de' Medici. Surviving political intrigue and exile, Machiavelli finds inspiration in writing *The Prince* by watching the behavior of the world-weary Florentine major. In the end, all of his political teachings come home to haunt him when his own teenage daughter falls in love with the very man Machiavelli considers his hated enemy. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes.*

Front cover photo: ArcLight Theater, New York City, featuring Liza Vann and James Wetzel. *Photo: Joan Marcus*

13 ISBN: 978-1-58342-539-8

10 ISBN: 1-58342-539-X



www.dramaticpublishing.com

Code: MF3

Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel



Printed on Recycled Paper

MACHIAVELLI

A Comedy

By

RICHARD VETERE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(MACHIAVELLI)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-539-8

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For my mother, Angelina Guiliano Vetere

MACHIAVELLI was given its off-Broadway premiere at the ArcLight Theater in New York City, September 24, 2006; produced by San Casciano Productions with executive producers Elizabeth Williams and Aruba Productions; general management by Ken Denison and Carol Fishman. The cast was as follows:

ALFONSO Lex Woutas
MACHIAVELLI James Wetzel
MARIETTA Liza Vann
GIULIANO Chip Phillips
LORENZO Jason Howard
BACCINA Stephanie Janssen

Director Evan Bergman
Set & Lighting Design Maruti Evans
Costume Design Michael Bevins
Stage Manager Elis C. Arroyo
Fight Coordinator Ron Piretti

MACHIAVELLI was given its world premiere at the Manhattan Theater Source in New York City on January 12, 2006. The cast was as follows:

ALFONSO Lex Woutas
MACHIAVELLI James Wetzel
MARIETTA Liza Vann
GIULIANO Chip Phillips
LORENZO Jason Howard
BACCINA Stephanie Janssen

Director Andrew Frank
Set & Lighting Design Maruti Evans
Costume Design Michael Bevins
Stage Manager Ben Sulzbach
Line Producer Daryl Boling
Fight Coordinator Jason Howard

MACHIAVELLI

A full-length play in one act

CHARACTERS

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI: 44, he's a witty, self-effacing and intelligent man of letters in the service of his government. Comfortable around power, he is the ideal man "behind the scene." At this moment in his life, he is in imminent danger and must learn to be "Machiavellian" in order to survive as he fights his own feelings of failure and insecurity.

ALFONSO CASTELLO: Late 40s, he's a major in the service of the military police in Florence under Medici power. He is a shrewd and tough soldier who has survived many campaigns and political upheavals. World weary, filled with aches and pains from battles he has fought, he can live with contradictions—a born Machiavellian.

MARIETTA CORSINI: 31, born to the wealthy Corsini family, she is Machiavelli's wife of 12 years. They have six children and she is still earthy, sexual and pretty. She is tough-minded, clever, self-assured, educated, intelligent and is at ease with those in power. Not afraid of anything.

GIULIANO de' MEDICI: 40, he is a poet who is ruthless when he is not being playful and vain. He believes he can keep power by being loved for the "great man" he thinks he is. He sees himself as the perfect courtier: stylish, educated and desirable. His major flaw: he thinks he's manipulating people when he is in fact being manipulated.

LORENZO de' MEDICI: 30, a soldier, he has a dry wit, bad skin, a scarred face, prefers war over peace, brutality over love. He wants to be the Prince of Darkness and rule Florence with an iron fist. Cruelty and pain are his inspiration. A true fascist centuries ahead of his time. His major flaw is that he does want to be loved.

BACCINA: 20, she is Machiavelli's youngest daughter. She embodies womanly perfection for her day. She has a flawless, milky complexion, intelligent and curious, she has studied her father's writings more astutely than he or her mother are aware. She is outspoken and ambitious and like many highly intelligent young people, she can't see the forest for the trees.

SETS: The action of the play in the first act takes place in a prison courtyard in Florence in February 1513.

The action of the second act takes place on the patio of the Machiavelli farmhouse in Sant' Andrea in Percussina seven miles from Florence in May 1525. The finale scene takes place two years later.

THE STYLE: The play should be directed as a comedy based on the style of Machiavelli's own play *The Mandrake Root*. The dialogue should be spoken quickly with an upbeat tempo with force and, at most times, with tongue-in-cheek. These characters are comfortable with power and ideas as well as their own personalities. They are bigger than life and they should act that way. The production should also be bawdy and uninhibited. These characters are Italians!

PROLOGUE

ALFONSO steps out on stage and we can almost hear his weary bones crack. He looks around waiting for everyone to get settled in. When he is ready, he speaks with the force and glee of someone announcing an important event. He's dressed as a military man of Florence in the year 1513.

ALFONSO. “Dear audience, quickly, open your eyes—
Our world is populated with villains and spies!
Our leaders have confused lunacy with grace
Leaving a trail of bloodshed and disgrace.
Those who reign were born into power
how can we ever have our finest hour?
Ignorance should no longer be our excuse
As we quietly accept disappointment and abuse.
For centuries ago in Italy a man was born, a Florentine,
Who observed a ruler need not be brazen or mean.
He penned *The Prince* a book you were taught in school
Which described how a man of power should rule.
Was this man a passionate Christian appalled by his time
Surviving best he could impetuous Medici crime?
Because now his advice is called evil
with its ethics notorious and medieval.
‘Tis better for a ruler to be feared that loved,’ he said.
‘Keep your friends close and your enemies closer’ or be
dead.

‘Be a lion to your friends and a fox to your enemies’ &
be alert to their schemes.

And ‘the ends always justify the means.’

The Church saw him as the anti-Christ. Henry VIII
called him ‘diabolical.’

And the world since has called him unscrupulous, Sa-
tanic and maniacal.

(LIGHTS WIDEN:)

ALFONSO. The year is 1513 and the notion of individual
freedom abounds

The Renaissance with its Art and philosophy astounds.

Here is the world we are about to share

With our hero stuck in his own nightmare.

(LIGHTS UP on MACHIAVELLI.)

I present to you—Niccolo. You decide if he is reptilian.

And when the curtain falls surmise what it truly means
to be Machiavellian.”

(ALFONSO walks over to the LIGHT as it WIDENS.)

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

TIME: *Dawn. February 1513.*

PLACE: *A prison in Florence.*

SET: *The courtyard area of a private cell. The courtyard is enclosed by a gate to one side as MACHIAVELLI sits on a stool with his head bowed and his feet in irons at the entrance to the gate. He is wearing a long, formless garment of a prisoner. He's in pain from being tortured. But there is a gleam in his eye. ALFONSO steps over to him.*

MACHIAVELLI. No more torture! Please! I'll confess!

ALFONSO. You'll confess to what?

MACHIAVELLI. Whatever crime I am being accused of.

ALFONSO. As I stated before, sir...you are not being accused of a crime.

MACHIAVELLI. Then why am I being tortured?

ALFONSO (*now annoyed*). I was ordered to torture you and when the Medici order me to perform a duty, there is no explanation needed.

MACHIAVELLI. But I'm a citizen of Florence!

ALFONSO. Yesterday, you were a citizen. Today, you are a hostage to the Inquisition. Now either stand or be dragged.

(MACHIAVELLI reluctantly stands.)

MACHIAVELLI. I have one request. Please send a messenger to Stefano Urbino. He's the only man in his city who can prove my innocence.

ALFONSO *(shakes his head)*. You do not want to name Stefano Urbino as a compatriot, sire.

MACHIAVELLI. And why do I not want to do that?

ALFONSO. Because just last week Giuliano de' Medici had Urbino's tongue pulled out.

MACHIAVELLI. Why did he have his tongue pulled out?

ALFONSO. He was accused of planning Giuliano's assassination. And there's more. Giuliano wasn't consoled by Stefano's loss of voice—so he had his feet removed. The feet and the man are buried in the geraniums behind us.

(MARIETTA appears at the gate looking for MACHIAVELLI. She is wearing a white dress and long cream-colored shawl.)

MARIETTA. Niccolo! *(She sees him, rushes to him and is stunned when his condition becomes evident. She turns and glares at ALFONSO. She smacks him across the face.)* How dare you treat Niccolo Machiavelli this way! This man gallantly served his government for fourteen years! He has been a guest of Louis XII, Caesar Borgia, Pope Julius II and the emperor Maximilian!

ALFONSO. My apologies. Unfortunately, when I torture someone, their past credentials are of little consequence.

MARIETTA. Well, this will be of great consequence to you! Here is a letter from Senator Stefano Urbino demanding my husband's release!

(MACHIAVELLI looks away. ALFONSO is respectful and reads the letter.)

ALFONSO. I'm impressed.

MACHIAVELLI. Mind your manners. My wife is doing the best she can.

MARIETTA. What's wrong?

MACHIAVELLI. Stefano was secretly executed last week.

MARIETTA. Then, Major, if my political leverage is outdated, may I appeal to your...“sympathy”? *(She discreetly lowers her shawl exposing her cleavage. ALFONSO is unmoved.)*

MACHIAVELLI. You're wasting your “breath.” I can attest to the truth that “sympathy” isn't listed under his soldierly duties.

ALFONSO. I'm insulted, Signore! You asked for air and I brought you to it! You asked to have your torture delayed, and I allowed you to see the sunrise. I take offense. I am a Christian.

(MACHIAVELLI looks to MARIETTA.)

MACHIAVELLI *(with a snicker)*. Do you have another approach perchance?

(She takes a beautiful jasper vase from her bag and hands it to ALFONSO.)

MARIETTA. Perhaps I confused you, kind sir. The sympathy I was alluding to is actually your “empathy” for fine art. It’s Venetian. The gilt and enamel mounting is the work of Giusto da Firenze!

MACHIAVELLI. One of the Medici’s finest goldsmiths.

(ALFONSO looks the vase over then hides it behind his back.)

ALFONSO. I’ll give you several precious moments alone with your wife. *(ALFONSO nods then looks off to R, gesturing to a GUARD who can’t be seen.)* Antonio will be standing at his post. I’ll return after I have my breakfast.

(ALFONSO exits with the vase. MARIETTA quickly rushes to MACHIAVELLI’s side, looks over his shackles and wounds, as each does their best to keep the other from worrying too much. But they’ve been married many years and find there is no time or room for sentiment in their lives. It’s a distraction that can get them killed.)

MARIETTA. I’m sorry it took me so long to reach you.

MACHIAVELLI. The last few days felt like an eternity.

MARIETTA. I took a chance with Stefano. I only heard this morning that he was arrested but I thought it best to continue with my ruse.

MACHIAVELLI. That’s why I married you: You persist even when you’re wrong. What about Giuliano?

MARIETTA. He refuses to see me. I may have to use my womanly wiles.

MACHIAVELLI. How can I plead my case when I don't even know why I'm here?

MARIETTA. Everyone else at the chancery is fine. You were the only one arrested.

MACHIAVELLI. From what I gather I'm being accused of complicity in Stefano's idiotic conspiracy. Under torture he must have blabbered that I listened to his stupid ideas! I need to get a letter to Giuliano.

MARIETTA. Dictate one to me. I'll go home and write it from memory.

MACHIAVELLI. Look under that rock.

MARIETTA. What for?

MACHIAVELLI. Just do it, please!

MARIETTA. Are you feverish?

MACHIAVELLI. Would you please stop being so argumentative! The time we waste arguing is horrendous.

MARIETTA. All right...all right. *(She looks under a rock and finds a letter. She hides letter.)* That is so you.

MACHIAVELLI. The letter is to Giuliano. Deliver it the moment you leave here.

MARIETTA. I shall. Is there anything else I can do?

(He takes her in his arms as best he can.)

MACHIAVELLI *(with a gleam)*. You look ravishing.

MARIETTA *(flattered)*. Ravishing? After six children?

MACHIAVELLI. I always find you ravishing. *(A beat.)*
How are my boys?

MARIETTA. Worried. But healthy.

MACHIAVELLI. And my precious Baccina?

MARIETTA. She misses her father but I've consoled her.
How solemn is our situation?

MACHIAVELLI. Solemn, but tell me—how is the Republic?

MARIETTA. All of the institutions have been dissolved.

MACHIAVELLI. How are the Medici holding up?

MARIETTA. They have complete control of the city. The pope is celebrating his victory. Everyone else has left.

MACHIAVELLI. That means the Medici have no allies in the immediate vicinity. That will be their downfall. And the people? You've walked the streets? What do they think?

MARIETTA. Just as this major here. They are going about doing their duty. They're tired of war, for the moment.

MACHIAVELLI. Perhaps they'll miss the Republic and want their freedoms back some day.

MARIETTA. You have too much faith in people.

MACHIAVELLI. Perhaps. But one thing I'm clear about: I've failed.

MARIETTA. I don't want to hear that again...

MACHIAVELLI. Marietta, I'm already forty-four years old...

MARIETTA. ...You have a room filled with journals and notes...

MACHIAVELLI. Alexander the Great conquered the world at the age of twenty-four.

MARIETTA. I'm so tired of hearing about Alexander and his conquering the world at the age of twenty-four...

MACHIAVELLI. Caesar himself was impressed!

MARIETTA. How delightful for Caesar. Alexander and Caesar, two butchers the world could have done without if you ask me.

MACHIAVELLI. Fine. What about this—by my age Dante had written *The Inferno*...

MARIETTA (*interjects*). ...*Inferno*...

MACHIAVELLI. ...and he was starting *Paradiso*!

MARIETTA. ...*Paradiso*...

MACHIAVELLI. ...and what do I have to show for all my years of experience? Shackles! Marietta, if I can only convince the Medici that I'm a valuable asset to their regime, I'll have the opportunity to make something of my life!

MARIETTA. But they are an enemy of the Republic?

MACHIAVELLI. I know. But I'm beginning to think that you have to be prepared to negotiate with evil if some good will come of it. And to survive I'd crack rocks for that family of inbreeds.

MARIETTA. You say the most audacious things just because you're depressed about your predicament. If you want to hear me complain, I have a lot to regret.

MACHIAVELLI. We're not talking about you, right now, Marietta!

MARIETTA. I have my own disappointments. I have my own failures.

MACHIAVELLI. I imagine you do, but right now I'm talking about my miserable situation! Why is it that every time I bring up my problems, you have to bring up yours, like it's some kind of competition over whose life brings more misery?

MARIETTA. I could have been a nun!

(*Stops him dead.*)

MACHIAVELLI (*sarcastically*). How fortunate for the church that you decided not to dedicate your life to

prayer and instead chose the noble cause of spending your life tormenting me.

MARIETTA. I may even be a Mother Superior by now! I could have been living in a villa instead of my mother's house—

MACHIAVELLI. You're mother's house?

MARIETTA. I'm sorry. I didn't want you to know. They came last night and took possession of our home. I managed to salvage your journals. Everything is safe. We are safe.

(He steps away truly saddened. ALFONSO enters. He is ready to confront MARIETTA.)

ALFONSO. Woman, if you don't leave, I will shackle you beside your husband!

MACHIAVELLI. Marietta, go!

MARIETTA. Niccolo! *(She hugs him as ALFONSO glares at her.)* I won't leave you!

MACHIAVELLI. Remember what I told you! Go!

MARIETTA. Niccolo! *(She turns and reluctantly exits.)*

ALFONSO. She's quite an engaging woman.

MACHIAVELLI. She has her many female contradictions but she can charm Satan from his pitchfork and have him thanking her for her thievery. *(Then.)* I wouldn't trade her for a thousand mules and all the gold in the New World. Are you married?

ALFONSO. My wife died last spring. *(A beat.)* Now, it's time.

MACHIAVELLI *(stalling)*. Did you know that Cicero argued that it is better for a prince to banish fear and hold

on to love? That way he can maintain influence over other people and his own safety.

ALFONSO. He didn't know people very well.

MACHIAVELLI (*interested*). Why do you say that?

ALFONSO. If I had to pick one over the other, I'd say that people respect the fear of punishment more than they do the promise of love.

MACHIAVELLI. Interesting. You've learned this from being a soldier?

ALFONSO. No, my father taught me fear. (*He looks off.*)

MACHIAVELLI (*looks off*). Will she be all right?

ALFONSO. I told Antonio to escort her to the gate.

MACHIAVELLI. I hope I see her again.

ALFONSO. I don't believe it is in your best interest to hope, sire. I suggest you pray. If this is any consolation: I take no pleasure in your pain.

(ALFONSO turns MACHIAVELLI toward the cell gate. MACHIAVELLI takes several small steps, then turns and looks up at the sun. It is now higher in the sky and its chilly, winter light bathes his face.)

He looks at it as if it will be his last time to see it. They then both slowly exit. LIGHTS OUT.)