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by Irving Stone

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THE LOVER AND THE SCULPTOR

The best of artists hath no thought to show
which the rough stone in its superfluous shell
doth not include; to break the marble spell
is all the hand that serves the brain can do.

THE ARTIST AND HIS WORK

How can that be, lady, which all men learn
by long experience? Shapes that seem alive,
wrought in hard mountain marble, will survive
their maker, whom the years to dust return!

BEAUTY AND THE ARTIST

Beauteous art, brought with us from heaven,
will conquer nature; so divine a power
belongs to him who strives with every nerve.

If I was made for art, from childhood given
a prey for burning beauty to devour,
I blame the mistress I was born to serve.

—MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI

BOOK ONE:

The Studio

HE SAT before the mirror of the second-floor bedroom sketching his lean cheeks with their high bone ridges, the flat broad forehead, and ears too far back on the head, the dark hair curling forward in thatches, the amber-colored eyes wide-set but heavy-lidded.

"I'm not well designed," thought the thirteen-year-old with serious concentration. "My head is out of rule, with the forehead overweighing my mouth and chin. Someone should have used a plumb line."

He shifted his wiry body lightly so as not to waken his four brothers sleeping behind him, then cocked an ear toward the Via dell'Anguillara to catch the whistle of his friend Granacci. With rapid strokes of the crayon he began redrafting his features, widening the oval of the eyes, rounding the forehead, broadening the narrow cheeks, making the lips fuller, the chin larger. "There," he thought, "now I look better. Too bad a face can't be redrawn before it's delivered, like plans for the façade of the Duomo."

Notes of a bird's song came fluting through the ten-foot window, which he had opened to the cool morning air. He hid his drawing paper under the bolster at the head of his bed and went noiselessly down the circular stone stairs to the street.

His friend Francesco Granacci was a nineteen-year-old youth, a head taller than himself, with hay-colored hair and alert blue eyes. For a year Granacci had been providing him drawing materials and sanctuary in his parents' home across the Via dei Bentaccordi, as well as prints borrowed surreptitiously from Ghirlandaio's studio. Though the son of a

wealthy family, Granacci had been apprenticed to Filippino Lippi at the age of ten, at thirteen had posed as the central figure of the resurrected youth in St. Peter Raising the Emperor's Nephew, in the Carmine, which Masaccio had left uncompleted, and was now apprenticed to Ghirlandaio. Granacci did not take his own painting seriously, but he had a sharp eye for talent in others.

"You're really coming with me this time?" Granacci demanded excitedly.

"It's my birthday present to myself."

"Good." He took the younger boy's arm, guiding him along the curving Via dei Bentaccordi which had been built on the oval site of the old Roman colosseum, past the high walls of the prison of the Stinche. "Remember what I told you about Domenico Ghirlandaio. I've been apprenticed to him for five years, and I know him well. Be humble. He likes his apprentices to appreciate him."

By now they had turned into the Via Ghibellina, just above the Ghibellina gate which marked the limits of the second wall of the city. On their left they passed the magnificent stone pile of the Bargello, with its colorful governor's courtyard, and then, after they had turned right on the Street of the Proconsul, the Pazzi palace. The younger boy ran his hand lovingly over the irregular roughhewn blocks of its walls.

"Let's hurry," urged Granacci. "This is the best moment of the day for Ghirlandaio, before he begins his drawing."

They went with unmatched strides along the narrow streets, past the Street of the Old Irons with its stone palaces and exterior flights of carved stone stairs leading to jutting penthouses. They made their way along the Via del Corso and saw on their right through the narrow slit of the Via dei Tedaldini a segment of the red-tiled Duomo, and after another block, on their left, the Palazzo della Signoria with its arches, windows and crownings of its tan stone tower penetrating the faint sunrise blue of the Florentine sky. To reach Ghirlandaio's studio they had to cross the Square of the Old Market, where fresh beeves, cut down the backbone and opened wide, hung on pulleys in front of the butchers' stalls. From here it was but a short walk past the Street of the Painters to the corner of the Via dei Tavolini where they saw the open door of Ghirlandaio's studio.

Michelangelo stopped for a moment to gaze at Donatello's marble St. Mark standing in a tall niche of the Orsanmichele.

"Sculpture is the greatest art!" he exclaimed, his voice ringing with emotion.

Granacci was surprised that his friend had concealed this feeling for sculpture during their two years of friendship.

"I don't agree with you," he said quietly. "But stop gaping, there's business to be done."

The boy took a deep breath. Together they entered the Ghirlandaio workshop.

2.

The studio was a large high-ceilinged room with a pungent smell of paint and charcoal. In the center was a rough plank table set up on horses around which half a dozen sleepy young apprentices crouched on stools. In a near corner a man was grinding colors in a mortar, while along the side walls were stacked color cartoons of completed frescoes, the Last Supper of the church of the Ognissanti and the Calling of the First Apostles for the Sistine Chapel in Rome.

In a protected rear corner on a raised platform sat a man of about forty, his wide-topped desk the only ordered spot in the studio, with its neat rows of pens, brushes, sketchbooks, its scissors and other implements hanging on hooks, and behind, on the wall shelves, volumes of illuminated manuscripts.

Granacci stopped below his master's desk.

"Signor Ghirlandaio, this is Michelangelo, about whom I told you."

Michelangelo felt himself being spitted by a pair of eyes reputed to be able to see and record more with one thrust than any artist in Italy. But the boy too used his eyes as though they were silver-point pens, drawing for his mind's portfolio the artist sitting above him in an azure coat and red cloak thrown over the shoulders against the March chill and wearing a red cap, the sensitive face with its full purple lips, prominent bone formations beneath the eyes, deep cheek hollows, the opulent black hair parted in the center and worn down to his shoulders, the long supple fingers of his right hand clasped against his throat. He remembered Granacci telling him of Ghirlandaio's exclamation only a few days before:

"Now that I have begun to understand the ways of this art, it is a grief to me that I am not given the whole circumference of the walls of Florence to cover with fresco."

"Who is your father?" demanded Ghirlandaio.

"Lodovico di Lionardo Buonarroti-Simoni."

"I have heard the name. How old are you?"

"Thirteen."

"We start apprentices at ten. Where have you been for the past three years?"

"Wasting my time at Francesco da Urbino's school of grammar, studying Latin and Greek."

A twitching at the corner of Ghirlandaio's dark wine lips showed that he liked the answer.

"Can you draw?"

"I have the capacity to learn."

Granacci, wanting to help his friend but unable to reveal that he had been borrowing Ghirlandaio's prints for Michelangelo to copy, said:

"He has a good hand. He made drawings on the walls of his father's house in Settignano. There is one, a satyr . . ."

"Ah, a muralist," quipped Ghirlandaio. "Competition for my declining years."

Michelangelo was so intense that he took Ghirlandaio seriously.

"I've never tried color. It's not my trade."

Ghirlandaio started to answer, then checked himself.

"Whatever else you may lack for, it isn't modesty. You won't become my competitor, not because you haven't the talent to do so, but because you care nothing for color."

Michelangelo felt rather than heard Granacci's groan beside him.

"I didn't mean it that way."

"You're small for thirteen. You look too frail for the heavy work of this studio."

"To draw one does not need big muscles."

He realized that he had been baited into saying the wrong thing, and that in addition he had raised his voice. The apprentices had turned at this contretemps. After a moment Ghirlandaio's good nature asserted itself.

"Very well, suppose you sketch for me. What will it be?"

Michelangelo's eyes traveled over the workshop, swallowing impressions the way country youths break bunches of grapes in their mouths at autumn wine festivals.

"Why not the studio?"

Ghirlandaio gave a short disparaging laugh, as though he had been rescued from an awkward position.

"Granacci, give Buonarroti paper and charcoal. Now, if you have no objections, I will go back to my work."

Michelangelo found a point of vantage near the door from

which to see the workshop best, and sat down on a bench to sketch. Granacci lingered by his side.

"Why did you have to suggest such a difficult theme? Take plenty of time. He'll forget you're here . . ."

His eye and hand were good working partners, grasping the essentials of the large room: the worktable in the center with its apprentices on both sides, Ghirlandaio on his platform under the north window. For the first time since entering the studio his breathing was normal. He felt someone leaning over his shoulder.

"I'm not finished," he said.

"It is enough." Ghirlandaio took the paper, studied it for a moment. "You have worked at another studio! Was it Rosselli's?"

Michelangelo knew of Ghirlandaio's dislike of Rosselli, who conducted the only other painters' workshop in Florence. Seven years before Ghirlandaio, Botticelli and Rosselli had been called to Rome by Pope Sixtus IV to create wall panels for the newly completed Sistine Chapel. Rosselli had caught the pontiff's eye by using the most garish reds and ultramarine blues and illuminating every cloud, drapery and tree with gold, and won the coveted prize money.

The boy shook his head no.

"I've drawn in school when Master Urbino wasn't looking. And I've copied after Giotto in Santa Croce, after Masaccio in the Carmine . . ."

Mollified, Ghirlandaio said, "Granacci was right. You have a strong fist."

Michelangelo held his hand in front of him, turning it from back to palm.

"It is a stonecutter's hand," he replied proudly.

"We have little need for stonecutters in a fresco studio. I'll start you as an apprentice, but on the same terms as though you were ten. You must pay me six florins for the first year . . ."

"I can pay you nothing."

Ghirlandaio looked at him sharply.

"The Buonarroti are not poor country people. Since your father wants you apprenticed . . ."

"My father has beat me every time I mentioned painting."

"But I cannot take you unless he signs the Doctors and Apothecaries Guild agreement. Why will he not beat you again when you tell him?"

"Because your willingness to accept me will be a defense.

That, and the fact that you will pay him six florins the first year, eight the second, and ten the third."

Ghirlandaio's eyelids flared.

"That's unheard of! Paying money for the privilege of teaching you!"

"Then I cannot come to work for you. It is the only way."

The color grinder was twirling his pestle idly in the air while he gazed over his shoulder at the scene. The apprentices at the table made no pretense of working. The master and would-be apprentice had reversed positions as though it were Ghirlandaio who, needing and wanting Michelangelo, had sent for him. Michelangelo could see the "No" beginning to take form on Ghirlandaio's lips. He stood his ground, his manner respectful both to the older man and to himself, gazing straight at Ghirlandaio as though to say:

"It is a thing you should do. I will be worth it to you."

Had he shown the slightest weakness Ghirlandaio would have turned his back on him. But before this solid confrontation the artist felt a grudging admiration. He lived up to his reputation of being a man "lovable and loved" by saying:

"It's obvious we shall never get the Tornabuoni choir finished without your invaluable help. Bring your father in."

Out on the Via dei Tavolini once again, with the early morning merchants and shoppers swirling about them, Granacci threw an arm affectionately about the smaller boy's shoulder.

"You broke every rule. But you got in!"

Michelangelo flashed his friend one of his rare warming smiles, the amber-colored eyes with their yellow and blue specks sparkling. The smile accomplished the redesigning for which his crayon had groped earlier in front of the bedroom mirror: when parted in a happy smile his lips were full, revealing strong white teeth, and his chin thrusting forward achieved sculptural symmetry with the top half of his face.

3.

Walking past the family house of the poet Dante Alighieri and the stone church of the Badia was for Michelangelo like walking through a gallery: for the Tuscan treats stone with the tenderness that a lover reserves for his sweetheart. From the time of their Etruscan ancestors the people of Fiesole, Settignano and Florence had been quarrying stone from the mountains, hauling it by oxen to their land, cutting, edging,

shaping and building it into homes and palaces, churches and loggias, forts and walls. Stone was one of the richest fruits of the Tuscan earth. From childhood they knew its feel and smell, the flavor of its outer shell as well as its inner meat; how it behaved in the hot sun, in the rain, in the full moonlight, in the icy *tramontana* wind. For fifteen hundred years their ancestors had worked the native *pietra serena,* serene stone, building a city of such breath-taking beauty that Michelangelo and generations before him cried:

"Never shall I live out of sight of the Duomo!"

They reached the carpenter shop which occupied the ground floor of the house the Buonarroti clan rented in the Via dell'Anguillara.

"*A rivederci,* as the fox said to the furrier," Granacci twitted.

"Oh, I'll take a skinning," he responded grimly, "but unlike the fox I shall come out alive."

He turned the sharp corner of Via dei Bentaccordi, waved to the two horses whose heads were sticking out of the open-top door of the stable across the street, and climbed the rear staircase to the family kitchen.

His stepmother was making her beloved *torta:* the chickens had been fried in oil earlier in the morning, ground into sausage with onions, parsley, eggs and saffron. Ham and pork had been made into *ravioli* with cheese, flour, clove, ginger, and laid with the chicken sausage between layers of pastry, dates and almonds. The whole dish had then been shaped into a pie and was being covered with dough, preparatory to being placed in the hot embers to bake.

"Good morning, *madre mia.*"

"Ah, Michelangelo. I have something special for you today: a salad that sings in the mouth."

Lucrezia di Antonio di Sandro Ubaldini da Gagliano's name was longer than the written list of her dowry; else why should so young a woman marry a forty-three-year-old graying widower with five sons, and cook for a household of nine Buonarroti?

Each morning she rose at four o'clock in order to reach the market square at the same time the *contadini* arrived through the cobbled streets with their pony carts filled with fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs and cheese, meats and poultry. If she did not actually help the peasants unload, at least she lightened their burden by selecting while the produce was still in the air and before it had a chance to settle in the stalls:

the tenderest, slender green beans and *piselli,* peas, unblemished figs, peaches.

Michelangelo and his four brothers called her *Il Migliore,* The Best, because every ingredient that went into her cooking had to be The Best. By dawn she was home, her baskets piled high with capture. She cared little about her clothing, paid no attention to her plain dark face with its suggestion of sideburns and mustache, the lackluster hair pulled tightly back from her brow. But as Michelangelo gazed at her flushed cheeks, the excitement in her eyes as she watched her *torta* baking, moving with authority and grace from the fire to her majolica jars of spices to sprinkle a fine dust of cinnamon and nutmeg over the crust, knowing every second of the seven-hour morning precisely where she was on schedule, he saw that she exuded radiance.

He knew his stepmother to be a docile creature in every phase of her marriage except the kitchen; here she was a lioness in the best fighting tradition of the Marzocco, Florence's guardian lion. Wealthy Florence was supplied with exotic foods from all over the world: aloes, zedoary, cardamom, thyme, marjoram, mushrooms and truffles, powdered nuts, *galinga.* Alas! they cost money to buy. Michelangelo, who shared the bedroom with his four brothers next to his parents' room, often heard his parents' predawn debates while his stepmother dressed for marketing.

"Every day you want a bale of herrings and a thousand oranges."

"Lodovico, stop cutting costs with a cheese parer. You are one who would keep money in the purse and hunger in the belly."

"Hunger! No Buonarroti has missed his dinner in three hundred years. Each week don't I bring you in a fresh veal from Settignano?"

"Why should we eat veal every day when the markets are full of suckling pig and pigeon?"

On those days that Lodovico lost he gloomed over the account books, certain that he would not be able to swallow a bite of the *bramangiere* of fowls, almonds, lard, sugar, cloves and expensive rice with which his young irresponsible wife was ruining him. But slowly, as the fragrances seeped under the door of the kitchen, through the family sitting room and into his study, it would eat away his fears, his anger, his frustration; and by eleven o'clock he would be ravenous.

Lodovico would devour a prodigious dinner, then push his

chair back from the table, slap his bulging viscera with wide-spread fingers and exclaim the one sentence without which the Tuscan's day is drear and futile:

"Ho mangiato bene! I have eaten well!"

With this tribute Lucrezia put away the remains for a light evening supper, set her slavey to wash the dishes and pots, went upstairs and slept until dark, her day complete, her joy spent.

Not so Lodovico, who now went through the inverse process of the morning's seduction. As the hours passed and the food was digested, as the memory of the delicious flavors receded, the gnawing question of how much the elaborate dinner had cost began eating at him and he was angry all over again.

Michelangelo walked through the empty family room with its heavy oak bench facing the fireplace, the six-foot bellows propped against the stone, its wall chairs with leather backs and leather seats: all prodigal pieces that had been made by the family's founder. The next room, still overlooking the Via dei Bentaccordi and the stables, was his father's study, for which Lodovico had had built in the downstairs carpenter shop a triangular desk to fit into the forty-five-degree angle caused by the joining of the two streets at this end curve of the old colosseum. Here Lodovico sat cramped over his gray parchment account books. As long as Michelangelo could remember, his father's sole activity had been a concentration on how to avoid spending money, and how to retain the ragged remnants of the Buonarroti fortune, which had been founded in 1250 and had now shrunk to a ten-acre farm in Settignano and a house with a legally disputed title close by this one which they rented.

Lodovico heard his son come in and looked up. Nature had been opulent to him in only one gift, his hair: since it grew freely he sported a luxurious mustache which flowed into his beard, cut square four inches below his chin. The hair was streaked with gray; across the forehead were four deep straight lines, hard-earned from his years of poring over his account books and family records. His small brown eyes were melancholy with tracing the lost fortunes of the Buonarroti. Michelangelo knew his father as a cautious man who locked the door with three keys.

"Good morning, *messer padre.*"

Lodovico sighed:

"I was born too late. One hundred years ago the Buonarroti vines were tied with sausages."

Michelangelo watched his father as he sank into his work-

reverie of the Buonarroti records, the Old Testament of his life. Lodovico knew to the last florin how much each Buonarroti generation had owned of land, houses, business, gold. This family history was his occupation, and each of his sons in turn had to memorize the legend.

"We are noble burghers," Lodovico told them. "Our family is as old as the Medici, Strozzi or Tornabuoni. The Buonarroti name has lasted three hundred years with us." His voice rose with energy and pride. "We have been paying taxes in Florence for three centuries."

Michelangelo was forbidden to sit in his father's presence without permission, had to bow when given an order. It had been duty rather than interest that led the boy to learn that when the Guelphs took over power in Florence in the middle of the thirteenth century their family rose rapidly: in 1260 a Buonarroti was councilor for the Guelph army; in 1392 a captain of the Guelph party; from 1343 to 1469 a Buonarroti had ten times been a member of the Florentine *Priori* or City Council, the most honored position in the city; between 1326 and 1475 eight Buonarroti had been *gonfaloniere* or mayor of the Santa Croce quarter; between 1375 and 1473 twelve had been among the *buonuomini* or Council of Santa Croce, including Lodovico and his brother Francesco, who were appointed in 1473. The last official recognition of the waning Buonarroti family had taken place thirteen years before, in 1474, when Lodovico had been appointed *podestà*, or outside visiting mayor, for the combined hamlets of Caprese and Chiusi di Verna, high in the rugged Apennines, where Michelangelo had been born in the town hall during the family's six months' residence.

Michelangelo had been taught by his father that labor was beneath a noble burgher; but it was the son's observation that Lodovico worked harder in figuring out ways not to spend money than he would have had to work in earning it. Within the Buonarroti fortress there had remained a few scattered resources, enough to let him eke out his life as a gentleman providing he spent nothing. Yet in spite of all the skill and dedication Lodovico brought to his task their capital had dribbled away.

Standing in the recessed wall of the eight-foot window, letting the thin March sun warm his bony shoulders, the boy's image went back to their home in Settignano, overlooking the valley of the Arno, when his mother had been alive. Then there had been love and laughter; but his mother had died when he was six, and his father had retreated in despair into