

**Time Traveler Tours
with Mary Hoffman**

Buried Alive
*The Secret Michelangelo
Took to His Grave*

Dedication

BURIED ALIVE

was developed and published thanks to the talents, goodwill, and dedication of many. It started as an idea, which led to a successfully funded Kickstarter campaign, which allowed us to create what you hold in your hand today.

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I therefore dedicate this book adaptation of the original Story App Tour produced by TIME TRAVELER TOURS to everyone who played a part in its realization. Whether your contribution was creative, financial, or purely emotional, it would not have been possible without you.

THANKS FOR BELIEVING!

Sarah Towle

Founder, Time Traveler Tours & Tales

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King of Infinite Space

The moment I step out of this hiding place, I will be arrested. Maybe even executed. It's my own fault, really. I've spent my whole life courting trouble.

But this time it's not a rival artist I've offended or a patron I've cheated. This time I've enraged the most powerful family in all of Italy: I speak of the Medici of Florence.

My refuge measures 12 by 3½ *braccia*. I should know. I have paced it countless times, and precise measurement is a

tool of my trade.

What is my trade? Sculptor. Painter. Architect. Builder of strong walls to keep out invaders. I am all of these, but it's the last that has set the mighty Medici against me.

Who am I?

I am Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, known to all of Italy as Michelangelo, named for the Archangel Michael, who killed the serpent with a sword and drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden.

HA!

That feels about right as I contemplate exile at the least.

Will the Medici really kill me for being a traitor, or drive me out of my Eden — my Florence — when I have given this city so much?

I was just trying to protect my homeland when, as governor of fortifications, I designed its ramparts in 1527. I have supported the Florentine Republic since the greatest of the Medici, Lorenzo the Magnificent,

became my first patron. My giant, David, stands as the symbol of our city-state, a representation in stone of the triumph of virtue over a larger, stronger, better-armed foe.

It has been three years, and the political winds have shifted again, as they so often do in Florence. My defenses were meant to stop imperial mercenaries intent on returning the power-hungry Medici to the top of the Florentine pyramid, not as republicans, but as tyrants. But even thick stone walls cannot hold back armed hordes in league with the pope, who happens also to be a Medici.

In October 1529 imperial forces laid **siege** to our proud city. For 10 long months we Florentines held fast. But in August, in the face of starvation, we finally succumbed.

The Medici marched back into Florence and I fell immediately from hero to traitor.

No sooner had they regained control of the city than the current head of the family put out a warrant for my arrest. And now I am hunted like an animal.

Soldiers were sent to my house. They searched it high and low. But I was not there.

I was here.

It's none too easy to escape a walled city under siege. So I convinced my friend Giovan Battista Figiovanni — whom I call Figi — the prior of the Medici family church, San Lorenzo, to hide me.

We chose a concealed room under the altar of **San Lorenzo's New Sacristy**. Few people know the room is even here. I do because this building has been my obsession since 1519. I designed and constructed it to honor the family to whom I owe my fame and fortune: I speak again of the Medici.

I, Michelangelo, the greatest artist of my time, should right now be filling my Medici Chapel with sculptural masterpieces. Instead, I am reduced to sleeping on a bed of straw on a stone floor. At least it was cool in here during the height of our sweltering Florentine summer. But with autumn arriving, I find myself shivering inside this coffin of stone, anxious to feel freedom and the sun on my skin again.

I have plenty of time to think as I hide here, under the **Medici Chapel of San Lorenzo** waiting for death... or forgiveness. I have nothing to keep me company save my memory of Lorenzo the Magnificent, some charcoal, and these four bare walls to draw on.

I fear this chapel will be my last commission and one I will be forced to leave unfinished.

I fear the family that afforded me my greatest triumphs is now to be my ultimate downfall.

Join me on a journey through the Florence of my lifetime as I attempt to reconstruct for you, as well as myself, the many twists in the road that brought me to this wretched place.

Loyalty or Blood?

In my life, I've had three families.

One was that of my wet-nurse. She lived in Settignano, just outside Florence, where my real father, Lodovico di Leonardo Buonarroti Simoni, owned a farm and a quarry. Hers was a family of *scalpellini*, stonecutters and masons. I believe as an infant I drank in their chisels and mallets with her milk.

My birth family was made up of Lodovico, me and my four brothers, and our mother, Francesca di Neri del Miniato di Siena. She died when I was just 6, after

giving birth to her fifth son in eight years. Lodovico sent me back to Settignano then, to the same woman who'd cared for me as a baby. I would stay with her until he determined me old enough to take up the studies expected of the son of a member of the Florentine ruling class.

The Buonarroti held elected office for generations in the Republic of Florence, and my mother's ancestors, the Rucellai, were among the city's most rich and powerful merchants. Their wealth came from importing a plant used by Florence's textile guilds to create a prized red dye.

Lodovico wanted me to learn Latin and grammar so I, too, could become a merchant or lawyer or someone important in the Church. Wealthy Italian families often sent a younger son to train for the clergy. Power and influence could only be assured if you had a direct line to the pope in Rome.

My father had great ambitions for my brothers and me, especially as he was content to live off the meager income derived from his Settignano farm and an

occasional job as a government clerk. But I could never be the man he wanted me to be. Even as a boy I was stubborn and headstrong. I knew that I was destined to use my hands to make things of beauty out of stone and pigment.

Lodovico was against my taking up art as a trade. He was not alone in regarding a painter or sculptor as a lowly servant who worked at the whims of the rich. He and my uncle beat me when I refused to study. But even as a lad I knew that I was called to create. It's what I was born to do.

I would not let the matter drop. Finally, I refused to see my tutor anymore.

Lodovico's only choice then was to whose workshop he would apprentice me. He had the Buonarroti name to uphold. Luckily he approved of my choice: Domenico Ghirlandaio, thought to be one of the best masters not only in Florence but throughout Italy. His portraits won him commissions from the wealthy; his frescoes were the wonder of all who saw them. And when Lodovico learned that an apprenticeship of three

years would put 24 **florins** in his pocket, well, he warmed to the idea greatly.

Ghirlandaio's *bottega* was teeming with activity in those days. It was an extraordinary place for a boy of only 13 to get his start. But it was a long time before I was permitted to pick up a brush.

Like all apprentices, I was used as a messenger boy at first and to do menial tasks like sweep the floor. Before I was allowed to paint, I had to learn how to grind pigments to produce colors such as malachite — a bright green — and indigo — a marvelous shade of blue. I learned to boil down glues, how to prepare wooden panels for painting, and how to plaster a wall to make it ready for **fresco**. And all the while I was made to draw. Seven days a week. I liked this best. I filled every scrap of paper I could find with my designs.

I was sent out into the churches and convents of Florence with Ghirlandaio's other apprentices to copy frescoes by earlier Italian painters. My sketching of these masters' works became quite good. One time I improved another pupil's work of a female figure

wearing robes by going over it with better lines.

Everyone said it was beyond the scope of a boy, and this attracted Master Ghirlandaio's attention.

Another time I made such an exact copy of a head drawn by an old master that I was able to pass it off as the original. Of course it helped that I had aged the paper, tinting it with smoke and various other materials so the fake could not be distinguished from that which was centuries old.

I learned many techniques in Ghirlandaio's workshop, but it pains me to say that Lodovico was right: I was being trained as a servant to assist a master in churning out works created by many hands in his style. But I had my own ideas. I wanted to experiment. I wanted to make my own creations.

After three years, I was restless and bored. I was already tired of taking orders and making art that was not my own, directed by a man I sensed would never be my equal. What's more, I'd grown weary of working with brushes and pigments. I wanted to work in stone, something the painter Ghirlandaio did not do.

Buried Alive

That was when Lorenzo de' Medici, then head of the Florentine Republic, contacted my master.

Lorenzo was a patron of the arts. He possessed many beautiful ancient statues that he had collected and gathered to create a sculpture garden. He placed them under the care of the master sculptor Bertoldo di Giovanni.

Bertoldo was a sickly old man then and no longer able to work. But he was considered a master teacher.

Lorenzo grieved that there were no famous stone carvers still living in Florence. So he determined to found a school with Bertoldo at its head, using his collection of classical statuary to inspire and guide. It was his dream to develop a new generation of sculptors, to reverse the decline of an art form that had once been the pride of our city with **Andrea del Verrocchio** and **Donatello**, who had been Bertoldo's teacher.

Lorenzo asked Ghirlandaio if any of the boys in his workshop had potential as sculptors. He asked for

Michelangelo's Secret

the two best pupils. My master sent me and my friend Francesco Granacci.

My third family, therefore, were the Medici. The same family now threatening to have me killed.

A Sculptor is Born

My connection to the Medici began then, when I was a boy. Lorenzo de' Medici, took me under his wing and became my patron. He gave me food and clothing and sheltered me in his household. He managed my education as both artist and scholar and commissioned my earliest works.

"The Magnificent" they called him, and he was. There was never a man like him, and likely will never be again. He was a swordsman, a scholar, a poet as well as a banker and a brilliant statesman. Though Florence

was then a long-standing republic, ruled by a council of elected officials known as the *Signoria*, Lorenzo held sway over the city as if he were a king. He was not. But he was fair and generous with the Florentine people. And he was passionately interested in philosophy and the arts, as were his father, Piero, and his legendary grandfather, **Cosimo**.

I was not quite 15 when Lorenzo the Magnificent took me in. How different my life would have been if I had never met him. I might never have become the most famous sculptor in Florence and Rome. I might never have won the commission to make my David. Or been called upon to build the Medici Chapel, *La Cappella Medicea*.

Lorenzo was always kind to me. Unlike my own father, he believed in me. It is thanks to Lorenzo the Magnificent that I learned to trust in my need to create. He recognized that I was born with a **genius** for art.

Lorenzo the Magnificent was not a royal prince, but a merchant prince: rich, influential, and very powerful. The Medici family had amassed its great

fortune from banking. They had branches all over Europe, and were sometimes called the "moneylenders of kings." They lived in splendor in an opulent palace built by Cosimo, found not far from the Church of San Lorenzo, where I am hiding.

I owe Lorenzo everything. He saw to it that I would become the greatest sculptor of our time. And now, irony of ironies, I hide under his family's church and the mortuary chapel where I should be carving the monuments I now sketch on my prison walls to honor his magnificent legacy.

There was no formality in Lorenzo's home. At dinner we all sat mixed up together: nobles, important men, family, and workingmen like me and Master Bertoldo. Always at the table were Lorenzo's three sons: Piero II, who was three years older than me; Giovanni, who was the same age as me; and their littlest brother, Giuliano, whose tomb I am now supposed to be carving.

There was also a younger boy called Giulio whom Lorenzo adopted when his father, Lorenzo's brother,

was murdered. There were some sisters, too, but I rarely ever saw them. **Girls** are largely shut off from society until marriage.

Night after night, I enjoyed the conversation of **great scholars**: painters like Sandro Botticelli, philosophers and thinkers like Marsilio Ficino, and the great poet Angelo Poliziano. These last two became the tutors with whom I studied alongside Lorenzo's sons.

By day I worked at the side of my friend Granacci, who came with me from Ghirlandaio's workshop, as well as a handsome but arrogant boor of a lad, **Pietro Torrigiano**. He thought because he was older than me, and therefore more experienced, that he was the more talented. He wasn't.

Even as a boy, I knew Pietro wasn't half the artist I was, and never would be. He mocked and taunted me, especially when he saw me being honored by Lorenzo's attention. We often came to blows. It is because of him that today I bear a crooked nose.

We spent most of our time in Lorenzo's garden near the Convent of San Marco. Bertoldo had us draw

from Lorenzo's collection of marble and bronze classical statues, sketching and eventually making copies of works by unknown masters who'd lived long ago.

One day there were some masons in the sculpture garden. They were shaping blocks of stone for a new building. I managed to beg a spare offcut from them. I had it in mind to copy an ancient and quite weatherworn head of a faun I'd found in the garden.

I worked hard to make that copy, using my imagination to design a mouth that over the years had worn away. I rendered the faun laughing, with his mouth wide open, displaying all his teeth. I was happy with my little creation.

Then Lorenzo came to the garden to inspect the building works. He saw what I had done and at first seemed full of praise for me. I was so proud! Then he spoiled it by saying, "Why does the old faun have all his teeth? Surely some would have rotted if he's so ancient!"

I realize now that Lorenzo was only teasing me, but at the time I was embarrassed. I so wanted to please him that I swore I would make good what was wrong. I carefully chiseled out a tooth and made a hole in the faun's jaw where it had been.

Lorenzo never joked with me like that again. Instead, he later gave me two blocks of marble to work with. Stone worthy of a real sculptor.

And now I ache to get back to my carvings again. Until then all I can do is sketch their designs on these prison walls.

Carving Marble

I carved my first original works out of those two marbles Lorenzo gave me. The first was a panel, which I called *The Madonna of the Stairs*. I portrayed the Holy Mother as a strong peasant woman, like my wet nurse.

I made the figures of Virgin and Child by cutting into the marble in a very shallow way, so that they hardly stand out from the background. The depth of the carving does not so much create a three-dimensional form, but suggests it through variations of light and shadow. The technique, which I learned from Master

Bertoldo, is like a drawing, though in marble. It's called *rilievo schiacciato*, or flattened relief, and was pioneered by the famed **Donatello**.

Donatello was my master's master and revered by Lorenzo, who often wondered out loud if I had it in me to become as great a sculptor as my Florentine forebear. Fortunately, I was exposed to his work everyday in the Palazzo Medici and elsewhere in Florence. I used everything I'd learned from copying Donatello as well Lorenzo's collection of classical statues, but rather than imitate them, I worked hard to make my sculpture my own. Even then I hoped that one day people would look upon my work and say, "This is by the hand of Michelangelo."

After *The Madonna of the Stairs*, I experimented with the first of my male nudes — lots of them, in fact — in another sculpted panel. *The Battle of the Centaurs and the Lapiths* depicts a legendary fight between Lapith tribesmen and half-man, half-horse creatures called centaurs. It takes place at a wedding where the drunk centaurs try to carry off the human women.

The theme of the legend symbolizes man's drive to overcome his bestial nature. It offered me the opportunity to show off my knowledge of muscles and ability to work the human form. The challenge I set for myself was to make the figures look so fluid that they would appear to be moving. I wanted to highlight the power and strength of the human body, but also to convey the fear and desperation humans must always feel at the height of battle.

To get this effect, it helped to entwine and turn the figures, so that heads and limbs, torsos, too, emerge from the same piece of stone in different directions. Some throw rocks; others are trampled; the bride is wrenched out of the melee by strong arms. We know not yet whether she will be stolen or saved.

There are more than 25 heads and 20 bodies depicted. I had to alter my technique from the one I used for the Madonna, incising the cuts in the stone much more deeply — a method of carving called *alto rilievo*.

Truth be told, I cheated. I was then better at sculpting human rather than equine forms. So I showed mainly the torsos of the centaurs, not their hindquarters, although you will find one.

I never truly finished the panel, so I kept it. Even today, whenever I look at it, I think I should never have wasted any of my life and my calling doing anything except sculpture. They say I am a great painter. But it is not my true discipline. Not really. I prefer chipping away at stone to release the majesty within rather than building up paint to create it.

I showed both these pieces to my father, Lodovico, but he never appreciated them. He never talked about the arts or philosophy at the dinner table. Rather than giving me marble and praise, he gave me only criticism and blows.

Though he never approved of my chosen path, Lodovico never tired of the money I sent him and my brothers. I've supported them with the earnings from my artistic commissions all my life. Yet, even when I became the most famous painter and sculptor in the

land, he still objected if I complained about his frequent requests for money.

I gave Lodovico and my brothers the respect due one's blood relations, and I always will. But Lorenzo the Magnificent was the father I loved. He understood me as a father should. Now his children and grandchildren would have me killed. I can almost sense him turning over in his grave above me.

The Sacred Defiled

Except for the indignity and inconvenience, not to mention the discomfort, of being captive and in fear for my life, this isn't really such a harsh sentence for the likes of me. I've never been happier than when I am on my own. I don't need the company of others. It's the work I love. Far more than people or politics, food or even sleep, I'd rather be left to myself to seek out the glory hidden in a block of fine stone. Or to turn a blank wall into a story in lines and color.

Alone in here all day, I can sketch without interruption as long as the candles brought to me by Figi and my assistant, Antonio Mini, hold out. The walls of my prison are my paper. And upon them I sketch my ideas for a monument worthy of Lorenzo, who in my mind is still The Magnificent. This way if I ever get out of here alive, I shall be ready to resume my next great work.

As I sketch, the events of my life come into view and I recall the first story I ever heard: about how, when I was just 3 years old, Lorenzo the Magnificent escaped death by dagger in our great cathedral, the Duomo, Florence's most sacred place.

It was Sunday, April 26, 1478. Lorenzo and his brother Giuliano were attending High Mass in the cathedral. Nine years before, upon the death of his father, then 23-year-old Lorenzo stepped into the same uncrowned position as ruler of Florence defined by his grandfather, Cosimo, our father of the nation.

The assumption of such a powerful role based on heredity, not merit, went against the ideals of a long-

standing republic such as Florence. It didn't help that Lorenzo had not yet learned his famously charismatic grandfather's skill of running the family bank. Neither did Lorenzo then understand how to use his wealth, as Cosimo so deftly had, to neutralize those factions opposed to Medici rule.

This left room for a dangerous coalition to form. It included the Pazzi, a rival banking family, and Archbishop Francesco Salviati of Pisa, who was an old enemy of the Medici. They hatched a scheme to dispatch the two Medici brothers and take Florence for themselves. They found support in an unlikely place, Vatican City, with Pope Sixtus IV.

It was determined that the brothers should be struck down as they knelt in prayer during the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. Two gangs of assassins sat among the unsuspecting congregation, one gang for each brother. The raising of the Host by the priest was their signal to attack.

Giuliano, who would not have expected an attack in church and so was unarmed, did not see the assassins

coming. He was wounded badly by the first dagger blow of Bernardo di Bandino Baroncelli, a friend of the Pazzi family, who for decades had been jealous of Medici power. But it was Francesco de' Pazzi himself who saw to it that Giuliano collapsed in a pool of blood. The younger Medici brother suffered perhaps 20 dagger wounds, they say, such was the fury of the blows the gang rained on him.

And this in a place of worship!

Fast on the heels of Giuliano's attackers, two conspirators dressed as priests came up behind Lorenzo. One grabbed him by the shoulder, meaning to turn him and stab him in the heart. But Lorenzo acted fast. Wrapping his cloak 'round his left arm to act as a shield, he spun towards his attackers with his short sword drawn.

As he defended himself, his friends and allies rallied quickly around him under **Brunelleschi's famous dome**. They sprinted to safety in the North Sacristy behind the church's high altar, and just in time,

too, for as they did, one of his defenders was stabbed so badly he bled to death before help could reach him.

Lorenzo and his remaining friends, including my future tutor, Angelo Poliziano, took refuge behind the great bronze doors of the sacristy. Lorenzo worried for his brother Giuliano, begging for news that would not come, for the cathedral was filled with the shouts of conspirators and the screams of frightened worshippers rushing to escape the melee.

Most didn't know what had happened. Some thought the dome was about to collapse upon them. Fear and chaos reigned.

In the sacristy it was discovered Lorenzo had suffered a wound to the neck. As he and his allies waited, a friend bravely sucked the blood from the cut in case the assassin's blade had been dipped in poison.

I thank God every day that Lorenzo survived. Had he not, I might never have become the greatest sculptor in Florence and Rome. And now, like him, I hide for my life in a church sacristy. Though my wounds are not physical, though my blood does not spill upon the

stones that are my bed, I know how terrified he must have felt behind those locked doors, waiting to be rescued... or murdered.

The Price of Treachery

Although Lorenzo appealed to the Florentine people not to exact revenge, what followed was ugly. By nightfall, five of the conspirators, including Francesco de' Pazzi and Archbishop Salviati, were rounded up and hanged from the windows of the Palazzo della Signoria for all to see. Jacopo de' Pazzi, the head of the family, escaped Florence, but was caught and brought back. He was tortured first, then hanged alongside the decomposing corpses of the other conspirators, including Salviati.

No sooner had he been buried than the same angry pro-Medici mob dug up Pazzi's body, dragged it through the streets, and propped it at the door of the Palazzo Pazzi. They used his rotting head mockingly as a doorknocker.

Other conspirators were hunted down all over Italy. Baroncelli, the first to strike Giuliano, made it all the way to **Constantinople**. But word of the attempted massacre spread beyond Italy, throughout the Holy Roman Empire. And Baroncelli was returned to Florence in fetters by the Ottoman sultan himself.

The Pazzi were banished from Florence, their lands and property confiscated, their name and coat of arms suppressed. The Florentine people remained loyal to the Medici, who emerged from the incident stronger than ever. But in the aftermath of the conspiracy, Pope Sixtus IV **excommunicated** Lorenzo from the Church as punishment for the bloody vendetta.

Lorenzo would not have that. You see, the pope, as head of the Church, has power and influence to rival the Holy Roman Emperor. The currency of papal favor,

therefore, is more valuable than gold. To secure the safety of Florence, as well as his own uncrowned sovereignty, Lorenzo needed to regain the pope's good graces. This was now impossible with Pope Sixtus IV, of course. But he was an old man. And Lorenzo, a banker, was used to planning ahead.

A month after the attack, Giuliano's son, Giulio, was born, and a grieving Lorenzo took his nephew in to bring up as his own. Who knows when the idea occurred to him, but Lorenzo decided this boy, as well as his second son, Giovanni, would one day solve his dilemma with Rome. It was a gamble and it required the belief that, like any good investment, it would pay off in time. Sure enough, in 1489 Lorenzo succeeded in persuading a new pope, Innocent VII, to appoint Giovanni a cardinal.

Having a Medici in the **Sacred College of Cardinals** was all Lorenzo needed to re-establish a strong papal alliance for the family. He often boasted that elevating Giovanni to cardinal was his proudest

achievement. (No doubt ducats changed hands, for Giovanni was then only 13.)

Giulio would follow Giovanni to the Sacred College several years later. And now Giulio, that little boy I once teased at Lorenzo's own table, is Pope Clement VII and is rumored to want me dead.

Now I am sure that, like me, dear Giulio remained devoted to his dead uncle and adoptive father, Lorenzo the Magnificent. I know this because it was he, as a cardinal, who gave me the commission to create the Medici Chapel and tombs just above my head. He gave me the order — and the money — to create a monument in memory of Lorenzo and his slain brother Giuliano as well as Lorenzo's son, Giuliano, and his nephew, also called Lorenzo.

And now I hide because they say this same man — this *pope* — wishes to have me executed? I refuse to believe this is true. I hold onto the hope that my former little brother will remember me with grace and treat me with compassion.

I believe it's Alessandro de' Medici, the current head of the family, who would have me put to death as a public demonstration of his power. He would martyr me, a famous Florentine, to further the Medici cause. But if Giulio truly believes, as Lorenzo did, that I have a **genius**, he will pardon me. If not, then I shall die before creating my last great gift for Lorenzo — the sculpture for his tomb I am now designing in charcoal on a wall.

Because Lorenzo did die eventually, though not by an assassin's dagger. He was cut down in the prime of his life by the same illness that afflicted his father and his grandfather. His limbs swelled up and his flesh began to decay, leading to a ghastly, fatal infection. It was 1492. Lorenzo was only 43, and I was just 17. I'd lived with my patron and his sons for little more than two years. The most formative two years of my life.

It was crushing to lose the man I loved as a father. In my grief I was not alone. The entire city of Florence turned out for his funeral, which took place at the

Church of San Lorenzo, where I now hide, keeping company with Lorenzo's ghost.

Where the City's Heart Beats

The Florence I was born into proudly called itself a republic. Since the 1400s, we were the only Italian city-state other than Venice to be governed not by a king, nor by an emperor, but by our own people. At least in theory.

In practice, our governing body re-forms every two months. In a short ceremony at the Church of Santa Croce to which all Florentine citizens are invited, one name is pulled from each of eight leather sacks, called *borse*, which represent **Florence's seven major and 14**

minor trade guilds. Only the names of male citizens 30 years and older who are not in debt and have not recently served in public office are included in the *borse*.

The resulting group of eight men is called the *Signoria*. The *Signoria* is managed by a ninth man, the *gonfaloniere*.

Upon their election, the members of the *Signoria* are required to leave their homes and families and join the *gonfaloniere* at the **Palazzo della Signoria** where they must remain throughout their two-month term.

It is no hardship. They are given splendid crimson coats lined with soft ermine. They sleep in fine feather beds. They are served lavish meals by green-liveried servants. And to ensure they never grow bored by the job of governing the interests of their city, they are entertained at times of leisure by a *buffone*, buffoon.

In reality, as I would learn as I grew from a boy to a man, control of Florence had remained firmly in the grasp of the Medici family since the days of old

Cosimo. He contrived to ensure that only the names of his allies and supporters ever made it into the *borse*. So while Florence appeared to be a democracy on the outside, it evolved over the decades into a government made up of its richest citizens. They'd learned well how to play competing factions off one another through bribery and sometimes intimidation to advance their own interests.

But as long as the Medici maintained peace and prosperity, we Florentines had no reason to dispute, or even consider, our lack of political freedom. We greatly benefited from the benevolent rule of both Cosimo and Lorenzo, who found ways to share the wealth, hosting public spectacles and feasts, and cultivating the arts.

Their patronage brought much work to the city's painters, sculptors, and architects. It attracted the greatest thinkers and scholars of our time. Grandfather and son shared a fascination with the ideals of ancient Greece, in particular the philosophy of Plato. In addition to classical antiquities, they collected old manuscripts, for which they created great libraries.

Florence was revitalized and made beautiful in their hands. No one knows better than I how important their patronage was for our city and state.

But when Lorenzo died, unofficial rule passed to his eldest son, Piero, and the Medici luster wore off quickly. Piero II was no match for his father. He was arrogant and frivolous and very unpopular, a spoiled son of a rich man. Florentines were willing to submit to Lorenzo's tyranny because it was kind and artfully disguised. But Piero loved the trappings of power and traveled about the city with a large retinue fit more for a prince than a citizen. He couldn't keep a secret and rarely kept his word. And he had no passion for the arts. He was also a terrible politician.

Upon Piero's ascendance to the unofficial Florentine throne I returned to the home — and the scorn — of my father, Lodovico.

Then came the winter of 1494.

Though Lorenzo had been dead for two years, the citizens of Florence still grieved his passing. And so it seemed fitting that the city should be shrouded in a very

heavy snowfall, unusual for Florence. I can't remember another winter so cold or so bleak, before or since.

That's when Piero called me back to the Medici Palace.

"Build me a snowman!" he commanded.

And so I did. I made a man of snow in the courtyard of the Medici Palace, and it was one of my best efforts. But it was never going to last. As it melted away, I knew somehow that Florence's republic would soon disappear as well.

It seemed symbolic that Lorenzo the Magnificent had given me marble to work with, which would last forever, while Piero gave me, and Florence, only snow.

Shortly thereafter, we Florentines rejected Piero and the whole Medici clan for good, at least we hoped. A massive army, assembled by King Charles VIII of France, descended from the Alps intent on conquering the Kingdom of Naples, a strategic port town. Tuscany, however, lay in its path, and Florence stood out as a glittering, glorious prize. As the French troops drew closer, Piero panicked. Without a fight, he gave into

their every demand, losing for us several strategic outposts in the process.

We erupted in revolt. Piero barely escaped with his life, pursued by an armed band, which chased him out of the city's north gate. They sent Piero into exile, saying they didn't want to be ruled by the Medici anymore. We'd run out of patience with the Florentine dynasty of rich bankers, who deigned, like kings, to hand down rule from father to son with the full support of the pope. We wanted to return Florence to true republican rule, by the people, for the people, through an elected, rotating *Signoria* with a *gonfaloniere* at its head. That was the only way to ensure representation for all.

But Florentines have changed their minds before. As I hide, they appear to be doing so again.

Bonfire of the Vanities

The root of the revolution to overthrow Medici rule, it must be said, began well before Lorenzo's death. It was spearheaded not by republican supporters, but by a poor friar called Girolamo Savonarola. He was a strict, fanatical Christian who lived the life of an ascetic: he ate and drank little and denied himself all comforts. He believed that living in austerity would bring one closer to God.

He was short and ugly with a hooked nose and full red lips. But he also had compelling green eyes and he was a charismatic, passionate preacher. People

flocked to hear him at the Church of San Marco, where he resided, and when his congregation became too large, he preached from the pulpit of the Duomo itself. He condemned the easy, opulent lives of families like the Medici and threatened harsh punishments after death for those Florentines keen on comforts and luxuries.

As long as Lorenzo the Magnificent used his money and power for good, no one paid much attention to Savonarola. That changed when greedy Piero came along. Then many in Florence started to agree that Savonarola might be on to something. Now with Piero gone, Savonarola's influence was on the rise.

Savonarola had huge bonfires built in the Piazza della Signoria and he urged us citizens to throw into the flames all our prettiest things — vanities, he called them — furs and fans, silks and satins, jewelry and mirrors, and, yes, even works of art. "Vanities" were anything you didn't need in order to survive.

He believed all should follow a simple way of life. I have never been one for luxuries myself — fancy clothes and fancy food — and it has always been true

that some families have too much while others have too little. But I got my start thanks to Medici generosity and money. Then, when the great painter Botticelli, with whom I'd dined at Lorenzo's table, threw his own precious works of art into the bonfire, well, that's when I decided it was time to leave Florence.

It was 1496. I was only 21 and had one sole interest: I wanted to make art. To do that, I needed commissions. And no one in Florence would be purchasing such "vanities" as long as Savonarola held sway.

I stayed away for five years. During that time chaos broke loose in Florence.

Piero de' Medici staged a coup to regain power. He failed, was captured, but eventually escaped. Many of his fellow conspirators were not so lucky.

This only spurred Savonarola on until his hold over the city grew so intense that he, too, experienced the corrupting taste of power. When his was a benign voice in the community, with few followers among the very poor, the *Signoria* tolerated the friar. Now, having

Buried Alive

just regained control of their city, they began to fear Savonarola's tactics. Florence became split between people who continued to support the Medici versus those who stood for the republic. Then, republicans further split into factions for and against Savonarola!

The pro-Medici element in the city grew more and more alarmed by Savonarola's fanaticism. They took their complaints to Rome, to Pope Alexander VI, **Rodrigo Borgia**, who summoned Savonarola to the Vatican. But the friar refused to go. So, in 1497, the pope had Savonarola **excommunicated**.

The pope also threatened to bring the whole city of Florence under his direct control. That's when all the anti-Savonarola factions, no matter their political leanings, united. The fear of losing the city they'd only just reclaimed brought their tensions to a boil. A mob set fire to the cloister at San Marco where Savonarola lived, and the *Signoria* called for his arrest. He was tortured, found guilty of heresy, and condemned to death.

First Savonarola was hanged. Then his body was burned at the site where his Bonfire of the Vanities had

Michelangelo's Secret

taken place. The *Signoria* wanted to make certain no one would later dig up and run off with Savonarola's body. They even had his ashes swept up and strewn in the river Arno so that people wouldn't capture them and pray over them, or sell them as holy relics to impressionable believers.

Little wonder I now fear for my own life. I know what my fellow Florentines are capable of.

Muscle, Sinew, Bone

Before I left Florence in 1496, I was restless and longed for something to do. Master Bertoldo had died shortly before Lorenzo, and I had no one to direct my studies. So I carved a little sleeping cupid with a design based on some old Roman statues I'd seen in Lorenzo's sculpture garden. Antiquities were much sought after among the wealthy in Florence and Rome, and it was not unheard of for them to turn up in the fields. So as an experiment, I buried my marble cupid in earth to make it look old. It worked so well that a friend of mine

encouraged me to sell it as if it were a genuine classical object. With no thought about whether it was legal or honorable, I decided to see if I could get away with it — to see if I'd made a good enough copy to pass as an antiquity.

A cardinal named Raffaele Sansoni Riario bought it. Unfortunately, he found out the cupid was not ancient, but made by me — I still don't know how.

I'd gone from Florence to Bologna and then on to Venice looking for work. I was living hand to mouth, not knowing from one day to the next where my next meal would come from. But still, I offered to give the cardinal his money back. Fortunately, he was more impressed with my skills as a sculptor than a forger. So much so that he invited me to Rome to carve a full-sized marble statue. I arrived in June 1496.

I must admit to being impressed by his attitude. He could have had me imprisoned for forgery, but instead he gave me another chance.

Like Lorenzo de' Medici, Cardinal Riario had his own sculpture garden full of antiquities and he thought a

statue of a Roman god, made by me, would fit in perfectly. So I carved my Bacchus, the pagan god of wine. I thought it was the perfect subject for a cardinal who enjoyed his pleasures. But it proved a bad choice. Either that or the cardinal didn't like my interpretation. For how else would you show a god of wine if not a bit tipsy?

My Bacchus is a handsome young man, who teeters on his feet after having sampled a bit too much of his creation from a generous goblet. His eyes are heavy with sleep and his body relaxed. He looks as if he might like to lie down for a nap. He's kept upright by a satyr who sits at the feet of Bacchus stuffing grapes into his mouth.

No one had ever created a Bacchus like mine before. Though the style of my statue is classical, it tells a new story of the mythical character. I was proud of that; I thought it was clever and amusing. But Cardinal Riario didn't like it one bit and he was not as forgiving with me the second time. He thought the statue scandalous and he didn't want to pay for it.

Fortunately, a rich banker, Jacopo Galli, also enjoyed the joke and agreed to buy it. What a relief to get some money after all the work I'd put in.

In those years before my Bacchus and my flight from Florence, I became obsessed with human anatomy. I wanted to know better how muscles worked, and how they were layered on bones. This knowledge could only improve my skill as a sculptor. So, just as I carved into marble, I sought out dead bodies to carve into as well, to study and to draw them.

It was Niccolò di Lapo Bichiellini, the prior of the Convent of Santo Spirito, who agreed to let me dissect corpses from the infirmary that adjoined his church. He gave me a room, too, and I worked quietly at night. No one could know. These were poor people who had no families to bury them. Still it would have offended any good Christian if I'd been found out.

I always treated the bodies with respect. I sent up a prayer in thanks over each one. And somehow the work helped me to get over my grief for Lorenzo. I

convinced myself he would approve; I was doing this to further my art and therefore to justify his faith in me.

In return for allowing me this confidence, I carved a wooden crucifix for Prior Bichiellini to hang over the high altar of his church at **Santo Spirito**. This helped exorcise my sadness as well. I poured it all into that image of Jesus suffering on the cross.

Rome was then the most important city in Italy, even greater than Florence. I knew the pope and his cardinals to be great patrons of the arts; many were extremely rich. So I thought it would be the best place to obtain more private commissions. However, I was afraid my luck might have turned for the worse after all the fuss about Bacchus.

But no sooner had Jacopo Galli snapped up my drunken god for his collection than a French cardinal put out the word he wanted a carving for his tomb that would be "the most beautiful work of marble in Rome, one that no living artist could better." Galli recommended me for the task.

I may have been only 22, but I *knew* I could do it. And sure enough, perhaps because of my success with Bacchus, I won the commission. This was the chance I needed. And I had learned my lesson well: This would be a pious work for a holy site, not a pagan idol for a pleasure garden.

I went straight to the quarries in Carrara to choose a perfect piece of white marble for my first *Pietà*, an image of the Virgin Mary holding her dead son, Jesus, in her lap.

It took me nearly two years to complete the *Pietà*. It was enormous and complex and every detail and fold in the Virgin's robe had to be carefully chiseled, then rubbed smooth, and then even smoother with finer and finer pumice stone. I wanted to convey the weight of Christ's lifeless body as he lay draped in his mother's lap, just delivered from the cross. Mary's garments cascade beneath him, holding him aloft. In this way, she embraces his heavy body effortlessly in her grief as she simultaneously offers her son up to God.

I made the Virgin's face like that of my mother's, or at least how I remembered her. Though some complained she looked too young to be the mother of an adult man, everyone called my *Pietà* a triumph. Unfortunately, the French cardinal died in August of 1499, before I'd had a chance to complete his monument. I had it placed, as he'd wanted, on his tomb in the shrine of Santa Petronilla, an ancient mausoleum attached to the Basilica of St. Peter. It drew the admiration of all. It brought me such fame that I was recalled to Florence. The *gonfaloniere*, Piero Soderini himself, suggested I might like to come back.

You see, with the turning of the century, the Medici still in exile, and the cult of Savonarola now burned up along with the man, the *Signoria* wished to usher their republic into the future with hope.

Along with the Duomo officials, they decided to revive an as-yet-unrealized civic project to create a colossal sculpture symbolic of the power of the Florentine Republic. The sculpture would combine spiritual strength with patriotic zeal to return a sense of

pride and confidence to their weary citizens. It would express the story of a certain biblical shepherd boy, who, though armed with only a slingshot and a rock, was brave enough to stand up to his enemy — the giant Goliath — and cunning enough to slay him.

David, who would later become King of the Israelites, had long been a symbol of the Republic of Florence. And it was time for a new representation. This one would be made from an enormous stone that lay neglected and weather-beaten in the courtyard of the worksite, *opera*, of the Duomo.

Though in use for more than 200 years by 1500, the cathedral was still a work in progress. And for nearly 40 years, since 1464, this massive block of marble had stubbed toes, been tripped over, sat upon, and walked around. It had been excavated from a mountainside by teams of *scalpellini* and carted for many days by teams of oxen along narrow, rutted roads in order to provide for the creation of a colossal adornment meant for the buttresses of the cathedral. Over the years, two other sculptors had tried to work it

and failed. Both claimed the flaw was not with them, but in the marble.

I was determined to win the David commission. Only a Florentine could fully understand the symbolic importance of such a project. And I missed my city. Rome was chaotic and corrupt and dirty by comparison. I was also the greatest sculptor then alive in Florence, even if I was only 26.

Besides, I'd had my eye on that marble for as long as I could remember. And I could never resist a challenge. There was a masterpiece within. I knew it. I just needed to remove all that was hiding it.

But first, I had to look at other Davids. For mine had to be different. It had to be distinctly by the hand of Michelangelo.

Donatello carved his marble statue of David over a century ago when he was in his early 20s and a student of Lorenzo Ghiberti. It was commissioned to top the Duomo buttresses. But that's not where it found its final home. The *Signoria* requested it be installed in

the **Palazzo della Signoria** when the sculpture was deemed too small to be seen at such a height.

That's when the Florentine leaders first recognized David's power as a political symbol for our small Republic surrounded by armed foes. They adopted the brave young giant-slayer at once and engraved his pedestal with a Latin inscription that reads:

*To those who fight bravely for the fatherland the gods
lend aid even against the most terrible foes.*

Donatello created his bronze David more than 30 years after his marble one. I knew it very well because it stood in the courtyard of the Palazzo Medici when I was part of Lorenzo's household. Donatello had taught my old sculpture master Bertoldo. He revered his master's work. I'd been made to sketch it many times.

Donatello depicted this David as an elegant dandy with a curious smile who wears a **laurel**-topped hat, rather than a helmet of war, as Goliath does. He is naked except for his tall boots. Thus, he is vulnerable, and so

young and slender it is hard to believe he could have killed a fully armed giant. Yet he wields Goliath's massive sword without effort as he casually props his left foot on the giant's severed head.

Some found this sculpture unsettling, but I think it's a beautiful piece of work. Donatello honors the beauty of the human body in this sculpture in a way he did not with his earlier, more rigid, marble David. This one stands alone, without support. The body turns, the weight on one leg, poised as if he could walk away. But at the same time the posture is relaxed.

This statue is a more classical representation reminiscent of works from ancient Greece and Rome and shows Master Donatello at his most mature. It communicates that David has overcome Goliath not by physical prowess alone, but through the blessings of God.

For me it works better as a symbol of the Florentine Republic than Donatello's earlier work. Little wonder it would also find a home in the Palazzo della Signoria when the Medici were first run out of our city.

Verrocchio made his David around the time I was born, in 1474 or '75. His is more fully dressed, but also young and rather flirtatious, an even less likely giant-killer than Donatello's bronze David. He looks quite delicate, but also proud and confident. He gazes out at us in triumph, having felled the giant. Yet one does wonder if the sword he carries might have been puny in Goliath's hands.

Some say this bronze was modeled after the artist **Leonardo da Vinci**, and I can believe it for Leonardo had once been Verrocchio's pupil, as I had been Ghirlandaio's. It was originally a Medici commission, but in 1476 the Florentine Republic bought it from the brothers Lorenzo and Giuliano for 150 florins. They placed it within the Palazzo della Signoria where it became a daily reminder for the *Signoria* of Florentine liberty and strength, but also their vulnerability.

Both Donatello and Verrocchio portray David *after* his battle with Goliath. They show David as the winner, sword in hand, a foot propped up on the head of the vanquished giant. This was the idea I started

with as well. But as I studied that enormous, weatherworn, rejected slab of stone in the Duomo *opera*, I saw something new in it:

I saw David *before* the fight. Before he knew he was going to win. I saw a single mammoth statue. I saw the work that my fellow Florentines would later nickname, "The Giant."

Forming the Giant

In the biblical story, Goliath is fully armed. So I decided to show David naked, at his most vulnerable, a young man ready to face a stronger, better-fortified opponent, armed only with a slingshot, his wits, and tremendously good aim.

The Bible says David chose five smooth pebbles from a brook as ammunition, but can you imagine Goliath letting David load a second pebble into his slingshot if the first one missed? I didn't think so either. He has one shot, literally, to bring the giant Goliath

down. So my David fears imminent death, while simultaneously expressing the concentration that comes with focused determination.

My David's facial expression is intense. People would later put a name to the look on his face. They called it "la terribilità." Many have had the audacity to say it is *my* expression! Perhaps I do look like this when I'm concentrating all my efforts on realizing a masterpiece. Perhaps that's how I looked when I was carving my David.

Once I'd determined how my David should look, I made a small model out of wax to submit to the Duomo officials and the *Signoria*. On the strength of that, I won the commission. They gave me two years to complete the sculpture.

Before beginning to carve, I made many, many sketches, like the ones I now scrawl on the walls of my cell. The anatomical knowledge I gained from dissecting corpses served me well in designing my David's muscles and sinews, bones and veins. I knew just how his body would react as he prepared to step

forward, feed his slingshot, and take aim at Goliath. Instead of expressing fluid movement, as I had done with my *Centaurs*, I wanted David to be poised to take action.

My ideal further perfected, I then made a larger and much more detailed model. This one I molded out of gesso, a sort of plaster made from marble chips.

I laid my model on its back in a basin of water and gradually let the water out a bit at a time until I could see how David's body and limbs should emerge from their marble prison. Using my submerged model as my reference, I was ready to begin to release my character, one chisel blow and layer at a time.

But before I could do anything, I had to build a scaffold around the marble block that concealed my David. At nine *braccia* tall, it was three times larger than any man, and I didn't want to waste a thumb's worth of stone. I had to be able to climb up and down, to remove the marble that bound my David from head to foot.

Each cut of a sculpture must be taken with great care, especially with a block as badly abused as this one had been. The two less able sculptors that came before me left me little room for error. One mistake and I would have to walk away from the stone block as well. I couldn't let that happen. And I grew uncomfortable being watched by all the people coming and going from the Duomo courtyard. Like David, I needed to focus in order to conquer The Giant. And to do that I needed to be out of view of the public. So I asked the officials if I might build an enclosure of wood and masonry to conceal me and my giant as I worked.

They agreed to let me do that. I even added a roof so I could carve in all weather. The work proceeded quickly then. First, I knocked out the largest pieces with my heavy iron *subbia*. Then, with my short-blade chisel called a *calcagnolo* I worked more carefully, chipping smaller pieces of marble until I got as close as I possibly dared to David's figure. Finally, I used a claw-toothed *gradina* to release him from his stone hiding place. And for complicated details like David's hair, I

used my *trapano ad archetto*, bow drill, to refine the stone.

I became so obsessed with my efforts to free my David that I spent more and more time with him until I would forget sometimes to eat or to go home to sleep. I can remember waking up of a morning on the wooden boards of my scaffolding with no memory of having stopped working. Then, suddenly, I would think of another detail, forget my confusion, and set about carving again, unaware of my body's need for food or sleep.

Though I had two years to finish my masterpiece, I'd completed the major part of the work within 12 months, sometime in 1502. What remained was the hardest part. I now had to smooth and polish and refine the stone. For the citizens of Florence I wanted my David to glisten and shine.

In June of 1503 the officials of the Duomo said they wanted a public viewing of David — in one week's time! They demanded the walls around my David be removed and the public be allowed to see him. He'd

been my private preoccupation for nearly two years. As I transformed him from block to character, so, too, had I been transformed. And while I was proud, I was also anxious about people seeing him. What if they didn't like him? I would never be able to stand tall in Florentine society again.

To my great relief, my David was greeted with awe and admiration. But mutterings in the crowd revealed a problem: like Donatello's marble David, mine was to be mounted high atop the buttresses of the Duomo, just under Brunelleschi's magnificent dome. But never before had anyone seen a sculpture of this scale. Now that everyone saw his size, they agreed not only that **David would be safer** left on the ground, but that he should be. They wanted him displayed where he could be admired from all sides — a new representation of the Republic.

But where? But how?

Moving the Giant

I suggested placing my David in the Loggia of the Piazza della Signoria because, for one thing, it had a roof that would protect the marble from the weather. But this was a place reserved for public hearings and political proclamations, so others objected. It was not a place for art.

Besides, what I wanted didn't matter. I was merely the sculptor!

The *Signoria* convened a *practica* — a kind of committee assembled to help resolve unexpected issues.

Thirty assorted experts and dignitaries met to discuss the fate of my David. They included Leonardo da Vinci, who was in Florence at the time working on his portrait of Francesco del Giocondo's wife, Mona Lisa, and other painters: the brother of my old teacher Ghirlandaio; Sandro Botticelli; and my good friend Giuliano da Sangallo, who shared my views about where David should be placed as if they were his own. They were joined by leading citizens and politicians, such as the *gonfaloniere*, Piero Soderini. They met in January of 1504, seven months after David's public viewing. But it would be another four months before they made a firm decision.

Finally in April, I received the news. David would be moved from the spiritual to the political center of the city. He would stand to the left of the *ringhiera*, the raised entrance of the Palazzo della Signoria, where the governors of the Florentine Republic lived and worked; from which official proclamations were read out to the people of Florence; and through which all citizens had to pass on their way to argue over great affairs of our

city and state. He would replace Donatello's sculpture of Judith slaying the Assyrian General Holofernes. Though Judith was also considered a symbol of liberty, virtue, and victory of the weak over the strong, she was associated with the Medici. What's more, some felt she'd become a bit of a bad omen, that it was not natural that a woman should behead a man.

So I was to unseat Donatello as the best sculptor Florence had yet reared.

The committee instructed me to ready my giant for the move from my workshop to the Piazza della Signoria. But here arose a new challenge. I'd assumed all along my David would be hoisted into place on the Duomo, just above the *opera* where I carved him. Now my Giant was being asked to "walk" many hundred *braccia*. A real man could make the journey in a matter of minutes. But this was no man. This giant was nine *braccia* tall, and made of marble.

Together with my friend Sangallo and his brother, I constructed a wooden cage made with massive beams in which David would be suspended and carried aloft on

a litter like a king traveling his dominion. It would take many more men to pull this litter through the streets. And the masonry above the *opera* doors would have to be broken to make room for my Giant to pass through.

Finally, on the night of May 14th, a team of 40 men, well primed with wine, assembled just before sunset to start moving my Giant. We prepared 14 immensely strong tree trunks, skillfully hewn to near-perfect roundness, then greased to act as rollers. The men placed these in front of the wooden litter in which David hung, then pulled both sculpture and contraption forward onto the logs with ropes.

That's when the final stage of David's and my journey began. As some of the men pulled the structure forward, others removed the logs that became exposed behind the litter and brought them to the front to pull the enthroned sculpture forward just a few paces more.

The men were soon sweating and growing frustrated with fatigue. I was supervising their every move. I had to make sure my David didn't topple and crash to the ground. We exited left out of the *opera*,

bore right, hugging the cathedral on our right, then turned left up the only road that was wide enough to accommodate both litter and men.

Out of nowhere, four youths appeared, hurling stones at my giant. Angered by this colossal representation of Republican values, they were intent on doing him damage. Three of the four were subsequently arrested, charged with acts of violence, and imprisoned. The fourth fled the city. They were all members of prominent Florentine families with connections to the Medici.

David finally arrived at the threshold of his future home in front of the Piazza della Signoria on May 18th. The journey had been arduous and painfully slow, taking us four days! But it would be three more weeks, on the 8th of June, before he was raised onto the platform of the Palazzo *ringhiera*.

Looking back, I should have learned my lesson that first night when my statue was attacked: that it's dangerous to be seen by the Medici as a Republican

sympathizer and equally dangerous to be considered connected to the Medici by the Republicans!

I suppose someone like me, who has friends and enemies on both sides, should watch his step. Pity I've never been a cautious man.

Who Rules Florence?

The Republic of Florence was ruled and managed quite honorably by the rotating *Signoria* for some years after I carved its symbol of courage and freedom:

David. Life went on as before. But in 1512 the Medici wrested control of their city back again and regained their family home here in the Palazzo Medici.

This was Giovanni de' Medici's doing. Remember him? Lorenzo's second son? Remember my telling you that among the achievements for which Lorenzo was most proud was persuading Pope Innocent VIII to make

Giovanni a cardinal back in 1489, when Giovanni was only 13?

Well, by 1512 Lorenzo's investment had paid off. Now 23 years later, Giovanni was in Rome at the side of Pope Julius II, who agreed to fund an army to help reclaim Florence for the Medici with Giovanni at its head.

You see, Italy's blessings were also her curse. A wealthy, relatively peaceful collection of city-states and duchies resplendent in natural resources, Italy was also strategically situated at the heart of the ancient trade route between Europe and the East. Our territory was clearly worth fighting over. The French had laid claim to much of the Italian peninsula without opposition as far back as 1494. But Pope Julius II wanted it back.

He requested the aid of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, to drive the French back over the Alps where they belonged. The emperor, wishing to cut French expansion off, was all too glad to give it.

Unfortunately for Florence, the republic under Gonfaloniere Soderini agreed to aid the French in their

contest against the pope, which stoked a terrifying rage in Julius II. So once imperial troops had driven the French out of Italy, he gave Giovanni de' Medici and his younger brother, Giuliano, his blessing to reconquer their native city. To do so, they hired a **mercenary army**.

We had no hope against a band of trained killers. And to drive this point home, Giovanni gave them orders to first lay waste to Prato, our neighbor just to the north.

It was a bloodbath. No one was spared. The very stones on the streets would have cried out if they'd been able.

The Florentine Republic surrendered before Medici troops reached the city. Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici installed his brother, Giuliano, to rule Florence for the Vatican. Gonfaloniere Soderini fled.

Summoned Home

One year after the Medici's triumphant return to Florence, Pope Julius II died. That's when the members of the Sacred College of Cardinals elevated Giovanni to the papal throne. They crowned him Pope Leo X.

Lorenzo's gambit of 1489 would now ensure that as long as a Medici remained at the top of the papal hierarchy their hold over Florence was unbreakable. Ironically, in 1515, Pope Leo X would re-establish political ties with the French, organizing his brother Giuliano's marriage to a French noblewoman. That

same year, the French king, François I, vested Giuliano with the title Duke of Nemours.

There was no end to what those Medici brothers could and would do. And although I never respected or trusted them as I had their father, they continued to give me work, and plenty of it.

I was in Rome in 1512, on my back, paint dripping in my eyes, finishing the ceiling of the **Sistine Chapel**, a work commissioned by Pope Julius II. Once it had been completed, I resumed work on another commission, also for Julius, to create a magnificent tomb of 40 sculptures. But I only had time to finish the centerpiece of the project, Moses, when Pope Leo X decided in 1515 that I should return to Florence. He wanted me to design a façade for the rough, as-yet-unfinished church of the Medici, San Lorenzo. The great edifice under which I now hide.

I was happy to get back to my native land. I never felt at ease in Rome, despite all my years spent there. The San Lorenzo façade would be a new challenge for me, combining sculpture with architecture. It would be

adorned with more than 20 statues, including six life-size seated figures above the main door, and seven low-relief marbles. I was looking forward to executing it.

But after several years spent refining designs, creating models to share with the pope, and excavating the marble to transport to the city, Pope Leo X suddenly suspended the commission. The brutal truth was that the pope had run out of money.

That didn't stop Cardinal Giulio, the nephew and adopted son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, from giving me a personal Medici commission. He wished me to build a second mortuary chapel at San Lorenzo. It would mirror the chapel built by Brunelleschi in the early 1400s.

You see, Cosimo de' Medici, the father of the nation, had found a final resting place in the Church of San Lorenzo, just in front of the high altar. Cosimo's father and mother were entombed in the Old Sacristy. But my Lorenzo and his brother, Giuliano — the one who was murdered during the Pazzi conspiracy — they were still waiting for a permanent home.

In addition, Duke Giuliano, the youngest son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, died in 1516 after only four years as Florence's protector. He was succeeded to the Florentine throne by his nephew, Duke Lorenzo, who died just three years later, in 1519. So their bones needed to be laid to rest as well.

I was to raise the walls of a New Sacristy chapel to match the dimensions of Brunelleschi's Old Sacristy, cap them with a dome, and fill the interior with altar and grand tombs for three generations of Medici — four men all bearing the same two names.

A New Language

I was honored to create this mortuary chapel for The Magnificent, and for his murdered brother. These two “Magnifici” would share a tomb, I decided, adorned with a glorious Madonna and Child.

For the other two Medici, those I hardly knew and who symbolized, for me, the fall of the republic I once championed with my David, I planned sculptural figures depicting the four phases in the cycle of a day and life: dawn, day, dusk, and night. Their tombs would be topped by a representation of the man buried beneath,

though each gazing upon their forebears — their betters, to my mind.

Like Brunelleschi, I employed Florentine dark gray sandstone, called *pietra serena*, for all the supporting structures. Contrasting that with white stucco walls, I created a rhythm of color that evokes serenity and harmony appropriate for a mausoleum. But from that point I departed from tradition. I used the familiar pillars, pilasters, pediments, and capitals of the Roman masters, but I placed them in unconventional locations. I included traditional decorative motifs — acanthus leaves, funerary urns, and wreaths, as well as grotesque masks and skulls symbolizing death — but I deployed them in absurd places. I took an old vocabulary but used it to create a new language.

It was a time of change, of the subversion of tradition, of the power of might over what was right. I was to build a shrine celebrating the return of hereditary power in the middle of a former republic. How could I not attempt to defy traditional conventions and expectations?

In my chapel you enter a realm where the laws that govern everyday life no longer apply. Doors are impassable. Pediments are broken. And dukes wear armor stripped of functional value, as thin as undergarments.

In 1521, eight years after being made pope, Leo X died unexpectedly. I thought my chapel project doomed. It was certainly put on hold. But wouldn't you know, after a brief intervening papacy of only two years, little Giulio — you remember, the son of Lorenzo the Magnificent's murdered brother? — well, he was elected Pope Clement VII. He reigns supreme now with the full support of the Holy Roman Emperor.

Once made pope, Giulio gave me yet another commission. In addition to carving the family tombs, I was charged with building a library at the Church of San Lorenzo, for his singular passion is collecting illuminated manuscripts, maps, and rare documents.

Imagine, the little boy who once sat at Lorenzo's dining table with me, now pope and able to give out artistic commissions like a child dispensing sweets to

his friends. But no sooner had I started building my library than the Florentine people fell out of love with the Medici again.

This was three years ago, in 1527. They promptly brought back Republican rule. And when the new *Signoria* approached me to ask for help to strengthen the city's fortifications, I understood they feared the coming of a vast, marauding army of warriors, aided and abetted by Pope Clement VII. He would never give up control of his birth city. His family had worked too hard to keep it.

Now I loved my patron, Lorenzo, but in the face of battle, I chose Florence. Not just my home, it is the pulsing heart of an artistic and cultural revival. Lorenzo may have been in large part responsible for this, he may have been my patron and father figure, but he was gone. Saving my city meant helping to preserve its treasures, in particular my David. Like him, I would face the Goliath that threatened to plunder my home.

And that is how I came, despite all that I owed the Medici, to throw in my lot with the republic once again,

and why I am a wanted man today. I have backed the wrong side for sure this time, and my time is running out.

Back into the Light

It has now been several weeks since I went into hiding under the tombs I am to carve for the family that gave me my fortune. I've lost track of exactly how long I've been kept from the sculptures that are to be the envy of all Florence.

The only news I receive comes from Figi and from my assistant, Mini. Whenever they do visit me, it is in secret. They take a terrible risk each time they come.

Then, this morning, Figi just flings back the wooden trap door above my head, and comes clattering down the steps, calling my name.

"Ser Buonarroti!" he calls. "Come up into the light. You have been pardoned!"

I am stunned. I take a step back into the shadows to shield myself from physical harm. But I see Figi is smiling and beckoning me up the stairs. And this is the moment I know that although the Medici are back in power, I am going to live!

The prior is so pleased for me and, I suspect, for himself as his "treachery" for having protected me has gone undiscovered. But my shock at my luck makes it difficult for me to understand the terms of my release.

So he tells me again that I have been pardoned; that I am to be restored to my former position at San Lorenzo with a salary of 50 *scudi* a month. But only if I resume my work on the Medici chapel. Pope Clement himself has authorized it!

I run up the stairs of my cell two at a time!

Figi and I head straight to his house, and his housekeeper lays on a grand feast for us, with food aplenty and lots of good red wine. As I eat and drink my fill for the first time in months, I enjoy the light pouring in through his windows. I relish its warmth on my skin. I rejoice at being alive.

Like a figure suddenly freed from his marble tomb, I am now allowed to do what I love best: to create beautiful things with my hands — the very thing that makes me who I am — and get back to carving my *Night and Day*, my *Dusk and Dawn*, and my beautiful *Madonna and Child* in honor of my patron, father-figure, and friend, Lorenzo the Magnificent.

BURIED ALIVE FOR 446 YEARS

When Michelangelo was pardoned and able to come back into the light, he left behind evidence not only of where he hid, but who helped to shelter him. This put the Prior of San Lorenzo, Figiovanni, in great peril. San Lorenzo was the Medici family church, thus Figi was their employee. Had they found out that he'd been aiding their nemesis, Michelangelo, they would surely have executed Figi for treason.

Michelangelo had to safeguard his friend. So he returned to his temporary cell below the New Sacristy of the Medici Chapel and he covered all his drawings in a thick layer of plaster. He buried his sketches, never to be seen again. Or so he thought.

What he didn't know is that the plaster would preserve them. Rather than destroy them, he'd preserved them.

For 446 years the whereabouts of Michelangelo's hiding place remained a mystery. Historians knew for centuries about Michelangelo's disappearance, but they did not know where he hid or precisely for how long. That is how closely Michelangelo, Figi, and Antonio Mini guarded their secret. Indeed,

Michelangelo would take this secret to his grave.

And then, one terrible November day in 1966, the Arno River breached its banks and wrecked havoc on the ancient city of Florence. The waters swirled, killing 101 people, filling basements with mud, and climbing as high as the second story of neighboring buildings. Untold rare books and works of art, mostly stored in sub-floors of the Uffizi Gallery, were damaged or destroyed.

The effort to clean Florence up and recover and restore the many damaged masterpieces went on for years. Little by little, clean up crews worked their way north of the river. It took them 10 years to reach the Medici Chapel less than a kilometer away.

The small storage room under the New Sacristy had been used for as long as anyone could remember to store coal for the chapel complex above. In 1976, workmen were finally sent down there to shovel up the sodden and ruined coal and clear out the cell. As they labored, a shovel hit the now crumbling plaster wall as it was plunged into the muck. Also weakened by the floodwaters, the wall fell away.

Before the eyes of the sweating, panting men there stood a masterpiece in charcoal on four walls by the hand of one of Florence's true geniuses and favorite sons.

Michelangelo's hiding place was found, 446 years after the master regained his freedom, and thanks only to the evidence he left behind, buried alive.

Epilogue: The Unfinished Chapel

After Pope Clement VII, Giulio de' Medici, pardoned him in late 1530, Michelangelo returned to work on the New Sacristy chapel of San Lorenzo. But he would never finish the project. The works here are in varying stages of completion.

The elaborate monuments to the lesser Giuliano and Lorenzo — the son and grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent — are the most advanced: *Night and*

Day on the tomb of Giuliano, Duke of Nemours; *Dawn and Dusk* on the tomb of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino; and *The Captains*, the representations of the two men entombed in the sarcophagi beneath.

Michelangelo's beloved first patron, Lorenzo the Magnificent, however, shares a single sarcophagus with his brother, the murdered Giuliano, topped only by a sad-eyed Madonna and Child. Surely the sculptor would have wanted to build the grandest tomb of all for The Magnificent. In fact, many of the works Michelangelo originally planned for the chapel are not here at all.

What happened?

There are many possible reasons why the master might have abandoned the chapel project before seeing it to fruition. Perhaps he grew bored with it. He'd already been working on it for well over a decade before going into hiding in 1530.

Maybe he lost his fervor for the project after all the interruptions wrought by war and siege. Indeed, the Florence of Michelangelo's youth had ceased to exist when he climbed back into the light.

In addition, it is well documented that Michelangelo, already naturally prone to bouts of despondency, escaped death understandably depressed. Not only had he lost his Eden, but during and after the months of plunder and pillage he suffered great personal losses as well.

Up to 200 Florentines died each day at the peak of the siege. Michelangelo's favorite brother, Buonarroto, was one of them, stricken down by plague, which swept through the city when its citizens were at their most vulnerable. Then in 1531, Michelangelo's father passed away. Though his relationship with Lodovico was always strained, he felt the demise of the elder Buonarroto deeply. With his father's loss, he'd lost his most personal tie to Florence as well.

Finally, it was not Michelangelo's character to delegate. A relentless perfectionist, he had difficulty relinquishing even the slightest control to his subordinates. Yet he took on more commissions than a single man could possibly manage.

What's more, the fertility of his imagination saw him reaching for greater and greater artistic heights. His original contract for the tomb of Pope Julius II, for example, was to create 40 sculptures in seven years. Given the pace at which he worked — taking more or less two years to complete a single piece — the Julius commission alone could have kept him busy for a lifetime. Once he'd resumed work on the Medici tombs, Pope Julius's descendants came after him to complete their tomb as well.

On top of the stress this surely caused him, Michelangelo was also starting to feel his age in 1530. Decades of laboring with mallets and chisels and block after block of stone that he, more often than not, helped to excavate from the mountainsides, had taken a physical toll.

But the most obvious reason Michelangelo's designs for the Medici Chapel were never fully realized is that Clement VII called him back to Rome to realize another commission, this time in paint: *The Last*

Judgment of the Sistine Chapel — the last wish of a dying man.

Even in its unfinished state, however, the Medici Chapel is one of Michelangelo's finest works. It represents the artist's attempt to unite sculpture and architecture.

In the New Sacristy of the Church of San Lorenzo, Michelangelo goes further than any artist before him to weave the organic, pulsing energy of the human figure into the rigid geometry of the built environment.

The works here tell several stories, collectively representing the cycle of life — the perfect theme for a mortuary chapel. The female figure of *Night* sleeps, while her male companion, *Day*, is wide-awake. *Dawn's* limbs are heavy from the effects of a relaxing night, while *Dusk's* are taut after a day of activity. *Dawn* possesses the grace and beauty of youth, while *Dusk* exhibits the ravages of age.

Together these four sculptures embody the ceaseless passage of time. The captains contemplate this, each communicating a different viewpoint.

Giuliano, Duke of Nemours, gazes outwardly, looking into the future. He holds two coins with which to ease his passage to eternity.

Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, turns in on himself, brooding. Unwilling to let go of the trappings of life, he hoards his wealth in a money box propped on his knee.

The Medici Chapel also chronicles the death of the Florentine Republic, a story told not by what is here, but by what is missing. Michelangelo did not welcome the new era he escaped into — one marked by the rise of nation-states proclaiming the God-given, or divine, right of men to rule others. An independent spirit and patriot of the now-lost Florentine Republic, his melancholy can still be felt in this monument today.

The eyes of the captains turn to the Virgin, who seems forlorn in her barren surroundings. She is flanked by Cosmas and Damian, the Medici patron saints. They were not carved by Michelangelo, however, but by less

capable hands following the master's designs. They do not come close to reflecting Michelangelo's original intentions for the tomb of the Magnificent.

Also missing from the space are sculptures Michelangelo intended for the empty niches on each side of the captains. He planned four statues of river gods that would have flanked the captains' sarcophagi, providing visual support for the figures above, who now cling precariously from their perches. There should also be frescoes covering the walls, but these never progressed beyond sketches.

When Michelangelo finally returned to the living, he blinked back the light of a new era in art as well. A roughly 30-year period of explosive expansion in the arts of painting, sculpture, and design was now over. This era, known to us today as the High Renaissance, represents an apex in the history of Western visual art. Michelangelo, alongside Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, contributed greatly to its canon of works still to be found in Florence and Rome. Their influence over

the development of art, architecture, and the history of ideas is unparalleled.

Michelangelo left Florence in September 1534 to travel to Rome and take up this new assignment desired by Pope Clement VII. Within 48 hours of his arrival, however, the pontiff was dead. Suddenly deprived of Europe's most powerful artistic patron, Michelangelo might then have been forced to return to the tomb of Pope Julius II. But Pope Clement's successor was another friend from Michelangelo's youth: Cardinal Alessandro Farnese had spent his formative years as a guest at the Palazzo Medici. He, too, enjoyed the company of the leading philosophers and poets of the day, as well as that of an enigmatic young Florentine sculptor.

It had been his lifelong wish to commission a work from Michelangelo. Now Pope Paul III, he would not be denied. He became the artist's patron until Michelangelo's death.

He saw to it that Michelangelo be given free rein to complete his vision for the apocalyptic painting

above the altar of the Sistine Chapel. It is said that when he first laid eyes on Michelangelo's powerful masterpiece, the pope fell to the ground in prayer that he might now be judged worthy to ascend to Heaven.

Then, in 1547, Pope Paul III named Michelangelo chief architect of the building of the new Basilica of St. Peter's, the one considered today to be the greatest church in the history of Christendom. From the time of this appointment at the age of 74 to his death at the age of nearly 89, Michelangelo dedicated himself to his friend and patron, and the work on the basilica.

Michelangelo would never set foot in Florence again. After his death in 1564 his remains were returned to his native city. He is now entombed with many of Florence's most famous historic figures in the Church of Santa Croce.

Michelangelo's Hiding Place Sketches



Only surviving sketch of Michelangelo's now lost
Leda & the Swan

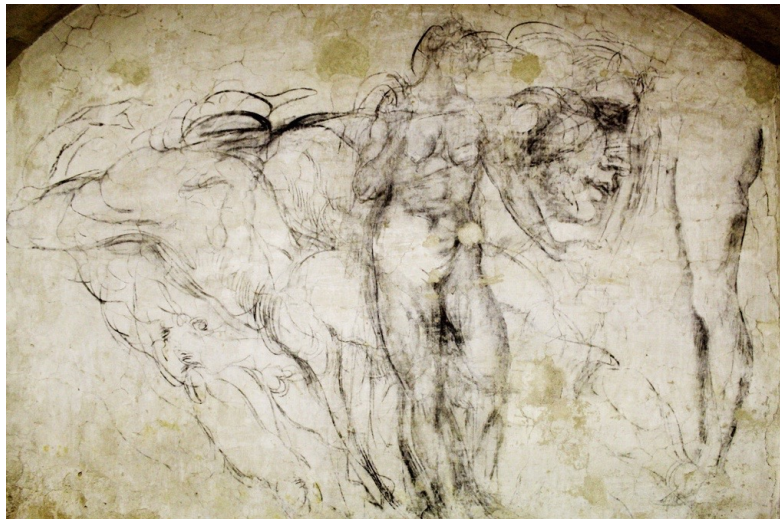


**A sketch for Hercules? The David-Apollo?
Or one of Michelangelo's slaves?**



**Eve, from the Sistine Chapel
(1512, The Vatican)**

Buried Alive



Long-view of Leda with other sketches

Michelangelo's Secret



Laocöon, which Michelangelo saw in Rome



**Matthew & the Angel, from Sistine Chapel,
(1512, The Vatican)**



**Knees of as yet unrealized sculpture for
Giuliano, Duke of Nemours, New Sacristy, San Lorenzo.**

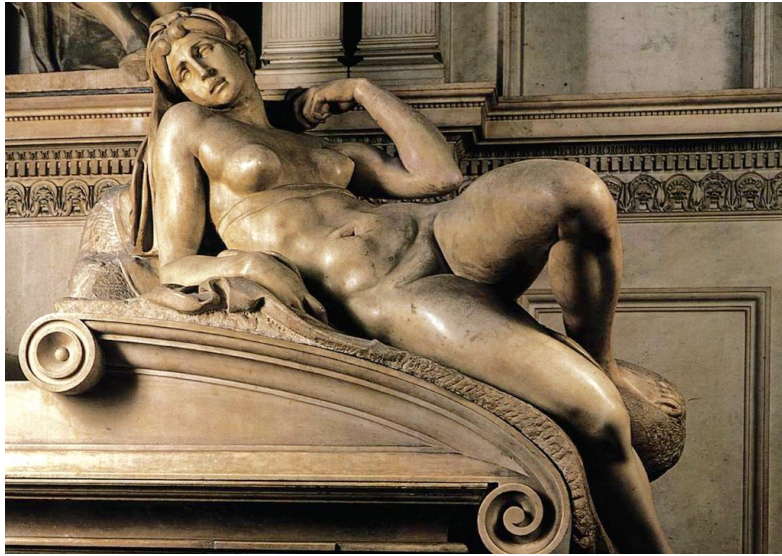
Michelangelo's Medici Chapel Sculptures



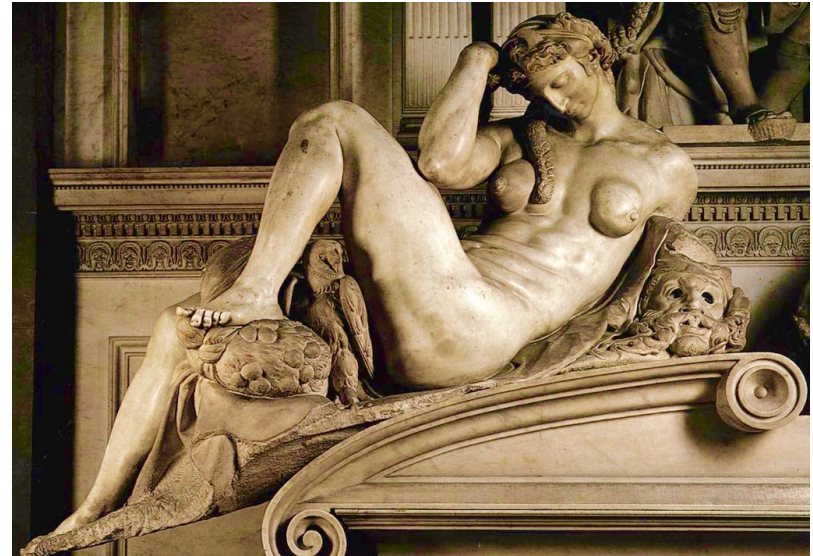
Madonna & Child

Buried Alive

Michelangelo's Secret



Dawn



Night



Day



Dusk

Buried Alive

Michelangelo's Secret



Giuliano, Duke of Nemours



Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino

Glossary of Highlighted Terms

Alto Rilievo

The sculptural technique in which figures stand out in much greater contrast and can be seen much more clearly. In English, it's called “high relief.”

Rodrigo Borgia

Popes, especially centuries ago, were not always the spiritual leaders we know today. Historically, they have also been powerful politicians and military leaders who ruled over vast stretches of Italy known collectively as the Papal States. Like mortal men, the pope also sometimes violated traditional church teachings. This was certainly true of Rodrigo Borgia, a member of one of Europe's most powerful and influential families that rivaled the Medici. As Alexander VI, Borgia was one of history's most controversial popes — known for murder, nepotism, and fathering many illegitimate children, all of whom he acknowledged.

Braccia

Like feet or meters, *braccia* were units of measurement used in Florence in Michelangelo's lifetime. *Braccio* means arm in Italian, so you can guess how long each *braccio Fiorentino* is: an arm's length — that's about 0.6 meters or not quite 2 feet.

Brunelleschi's Dome

Along with Michelangelo's David, Filippo Brunelleschi's dome that tops the Duomo is probably the most iconic symbol of Florence. Brunelleschi's genius was in constructing the massive dome without scaffolding or supporting buttresses, as had been the technique for centuries. Drawing his inspiration from the Pantheon, built centuries earlier in Rome, Brunelleschi's dome marked the starting point of Renaissance architecture.

College of Cardinals

The most important officials in the Catholic Church after the pope are the cardinals. The sacred college has only a few functions: One is to advise the pontiff; the other is to select a

new pope when the papal throne falls vacant. In Michelangelo's day, the pope often fought for influence with the cardinals. He was also often short of money, which is why he was known to sell the coveted position of cardinal to wealthy families such as the Medici.

Constantinople

Now known as Istanbul (in present-day Turkey) and previously as Byzantium, this historic city was for centuries a wealthy capital, spanning the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman empires.

Cosimo de' Medici

When Cosimo and his brother inherited the Medici Bank from their father in about 1420, its clients already included important people like popes and cardinals. Cosimo used the connections to enhance his position in Florence and lay the foundation for the brand that would endure for centuries. As we'll see with the later Medici, he also made enemies and was forced briefly into exile. Upon his return to Florence, he became an active patron of the arts to promote unity in the city-

state, giving an important lift to what we now know as the *Renaissance*. Arts patronage and political power were threads that ran through the entire Medici story. Cosimo, who would later be named the “*pater patriae*” (father of the nation) of Florence, died in 1464.

Donatello

Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, or Donatello, was born 100 years before Michelangelo. He, too, was one of the giants. His sculptures decorate the Duomo, and he worked with both Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti. For Lorenzo di Medici to have challenged Michelangelo to match Donatello was like pushing a teenager today to out-sing and out-dance Michael Jackson.

Excommunication

Excommunication is the forbidding by the pope of an individual or community from taking Communion. i.e. not being allowed to “communicate” with the divine.

Florentine Guilds

Dating back to 12th century Florence, associations — or guilds — of skilled merchants and tradesmen ordered and organized many aspects of daily life. The seven major guilds included the legal profession; cloth importers; wool manufacturers and merchants; bankers; silk weavers; physicians and pharmacists; and furriers. Among the 14 “minor” guilds were butchers, shoemakers, and olive oil merchants.

Florins

The money used in Florence in Michelangelo’s lifetime was originally struck from gold in the 13th century. Because Florentine banks, such as the Medici’s, spread so widely, *florins* became international currency. The name stuck and was subsequently used for money elsewhere, such as in Holland.

Other currencies used in Michelangelo’s day were *ducats* and *scudi*. Ducats, derived from “dukes,” were issued in duchies, such as Milan. Scudi were the currency of the Papal States.

Fresco

A *fresco* is more than just a painting on a wall (that's a mural). In a fresco, the wall itself becomes a work of art because the painter lays colors into the wet plaster before it sets. Once it dries, the image is part of the wall itself.

Girls in the Renaissance (Il Rinascimento)

For a family like the Medici, marriage was a business transaction. Girls could be married by the age of 15 or earlier. They were often promised to their future husbands well before that. And since Michelangelo's story takes place in a period shortly after plagues wiped out a huge part of the population, the need for girls to start producing children as soon as possible was paramount.

Genius

It takes a genius to follow the evolving definition of *genius* during the Renaissance. At the time of their youth, such masters as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo were said to *have* a genius, a guardian spirit who aided them in their artistic expression. The implication was that their talent was a

supernatural gift. By the time Michelangelo died, however, one was said to *be* a genius, suggesting that talent came from within.

Laurel Branch — Historical Significance

An ancient symbol of both peace and victory, circular wreaths made of interlocking laurel branches and leaves have been worn by victors — from sporting events, such as the Olympics, to battles — since the days of the ancient Greeks. The symbol has been popular among kings for millennia.

Laurentian Library

Known as the Laurentian Library, in honor of Lorenzo the Magnificent, this was another Medici commission in the Church of San Lorenzo. Michelangelo began designing it while also working on the New Sacristy. It was ordered by the Medici Pope Clement VII in 1523, the year he was elevated, to house the family's historic collection of texts and illuminated manuscripts. As we learn, Michelangelo fled Florence for good in 1534 and so wasn't around to supervise construction or completion of the great building. Once realized, however, its

architectural style would break even more boundaries than the New Sacristy.

Leonardo da Vinci

The personification of “Renaissance Man,” Leonardo was an artist, thinker, industrial designer, inventor, and futurist. Any list of the greatest geniuses of humankind would have to include Leonardo. And in one of the great quirks of history, he was also an older contemporary of Michelangelo’s. Though Leonardo was 20 years his senior, the two were foils and rivals for decades: Leonardo, the painter, Michelangelo, the sculptor; Leonardo, the celebrity who basked in adulation, Michelangelo, the solitary artist. The painter Raphael, or Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, completed the trio of the High Renaissance’s grand masters. Also a rival of Michelangelo’s, his best-known works are at the Vatican.

The Medici Family

Beginning in Florence in the 1300s, the Medici evolved from a family of bankers to a dynasty. By the time the dynasty came to an end in the 1700s, the Medici had produced three

popes and married into the royal family of France, spreading their influence through the most powerful institutions in Europe.

Mercenary Army

Mercenaries are hired to fight wars on behalf of governments, kingdoms, countries, city-states, etc. Their only allegiance is to their bank accounts.

New Sacristy Chapel

The nearly 500-year-old “new” sacristy chapel at the church of San Lorenzo was a commission given to Michelangelo by Giulio de’ Medici, Pope Clement VII. Michelangelo was in the middle of working on it when he had to go into hiding (from which he’s narrating the story you’re now following.)

There is another chapel there, the Chapel of the Princes, which was built much later and is therefore not a part of this story.

Palazzo Della Signoria

Today known as the Palazzo Vecchio (old palace), this enormous building anchors Florence's main square, which is still called Piazza della Signoria.

Renaissance Scholars

The period from about 1400 to 1600 has come to be known as the *Renaissance*, which means “rebirth” or “revival” in French. It began with the rediscovery — and appreciation — in Europe of the classic writings of the ancient Greeks, especially the philosophers Plato and Aristotle, who laid the intellectual foundation of Western civilization. In fact, Michelangelo's companion at the Medici dining table, Marsilio Ficino, was renowned for translating the writings of Plato, Aristotle's teacher, from the original Greek into Latin. This helped fuel the movement we now know as Humanism.

Sacristy

Strictly speaking a sacristy is more like a church storage room — a place to house records, furnishings, jugs, and goblets — or a place where the priest prepares for Mass. It isn't

typically thought of as a historically and artistically important monument as it is in the Medici family church of San Lorenzo. And at San Lorenzo, there are two sacristies!

Dating to the early 1400s, the Old Sacristy was designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, already famous for his architectural feat with the Duomo dome. The New Sacristy, built 100 years later, is the work of Michelangelo and is now part of a more extended complex known as the Medici Chapels.

Both Old and New Sacristies contain the remains of Medici family members. They are each a remarkable architectural achievement. You will find out all about Michelangelo's New Sacristy chapel in the Epilogue of this story.

Santo Spirito

A 15th century church on the southern side of the Arno River (the Oltrarno), Santo Spirito was a site of humanist education throughout Michelangelo's lifetime.

Siege

In a siege an army seals off an area — usually a city or town — trapping its people and preventing them from getting what they need from outside, such as food and other vital supplies.

In October 1529 a Spanish-led army funded by the pope trapped Florentines inside their own walled city. Their ordeal lasted 10 months until finally, in August 1530, they surrendered to the most powerful military might in Europe.

Sistine Chapel

A chapel in the Vatican named for Pope Sixtus IV (*Papa Sisto* in Italian), it was restored from 1477 to 1480 thanks to the work of great Renaissance painters including Sandro Botticelli and Ghirlandaio. It has been a tourist attraction for centuries. People flock there to see Michelangelo's famous contributions: the painted ceiling and depiction of the Last Judgment over the chapel altar.

Pietro Torrigiano

A contemporary of Michelangelo's, Torrigiano was not the best sculptor in Florence. But he thought he was. While he was indisputably talented, he was mostly known for his hot temper. So after he broke Michelangelo's nose in a fight — angering Lorenzo — he fled town.

The high points of Torrigiano's accomplished career were in England, and his best-known works are in Westminster Abbey, thanks to commissions from the English royal family. He died young, before Michelangelo went into hiding.

Verrocchio

Born Andrea di Michele di Francesco de' Cioni in 1435, Verrocchio left an incalculable legacy: Though he was known as a painter, sculptor, and goldsmith, you can see his most lasting mark left by his apprentices, Leonardo da Vinci and Domenico Ghirlandaio, who in turn was Michelangelo's first master.

Why David Would Be Safer on the Ground

At 9 *braccia* tall — 17 feet or 5.2 meters — Michelangelo's David weighs approximately 6 tons (12,000 pounds). That's the weight of about two full-grown elephants or three cars. Not only would it have been an extraordinary feat to hoist him atop the Duomo buttresses, but imagine what would have happened if he fell!

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