

THE BLOCK OF MARBLE

as told by Leigh Ann McCann

A block of white marble measuring about 3 feet wide and 17 feet high stood on the cold ground of a workshop in the renaissance city of Florence, Italy. The workshop was for those gifted in carving stone into beautifully sculpted figures. Florence was the place to be for sculptors, both young and old; aspiring students and old masters all flocked to this workplace.

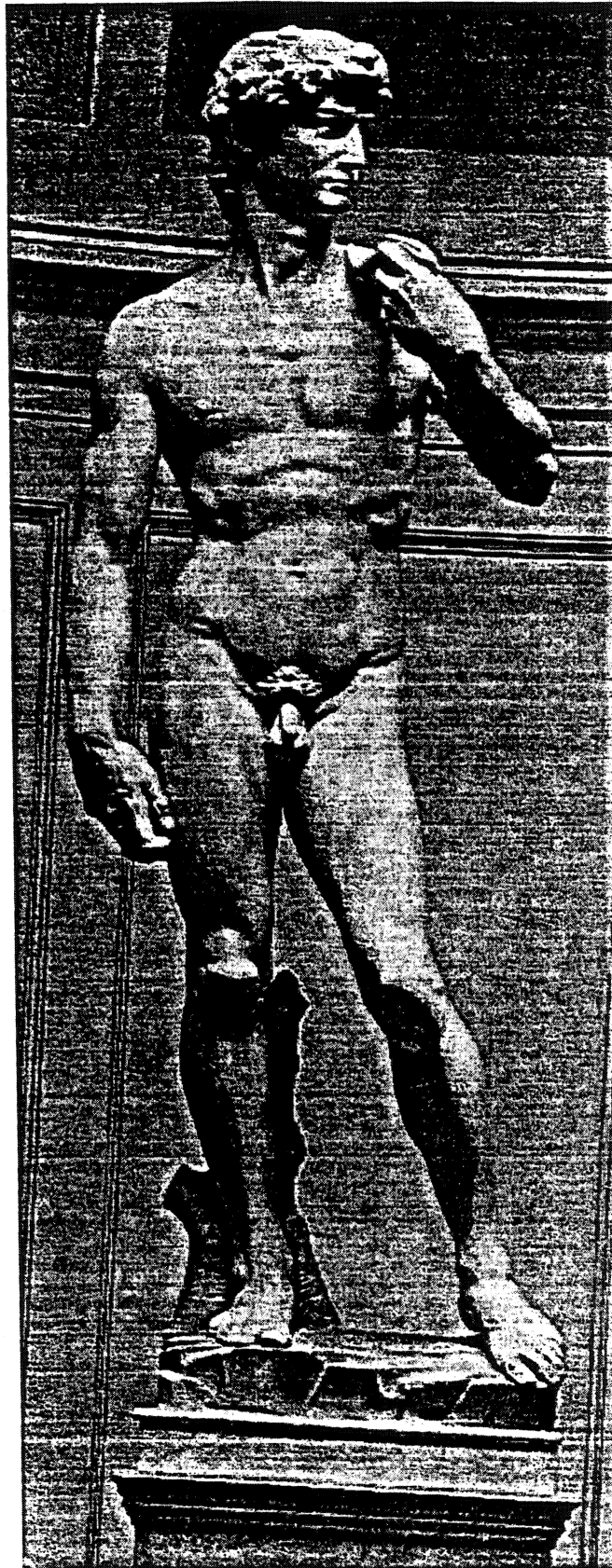
This particular block of marble had been carefully transported across the Italian countryside from the famous Carrara (Kuh-rare-uh) quarry. An ambitious young sculptor had eagerly begun working on this piece when his metal chisel slipped, causing a deep, ugly gouge in the marble. His teacher, seeing the mistake, advised him to leave that piece of marble and choose another, unblemished piece to work on. The large block of beautiful marble was now considered worthless and cast to the outer edges of the workshop.

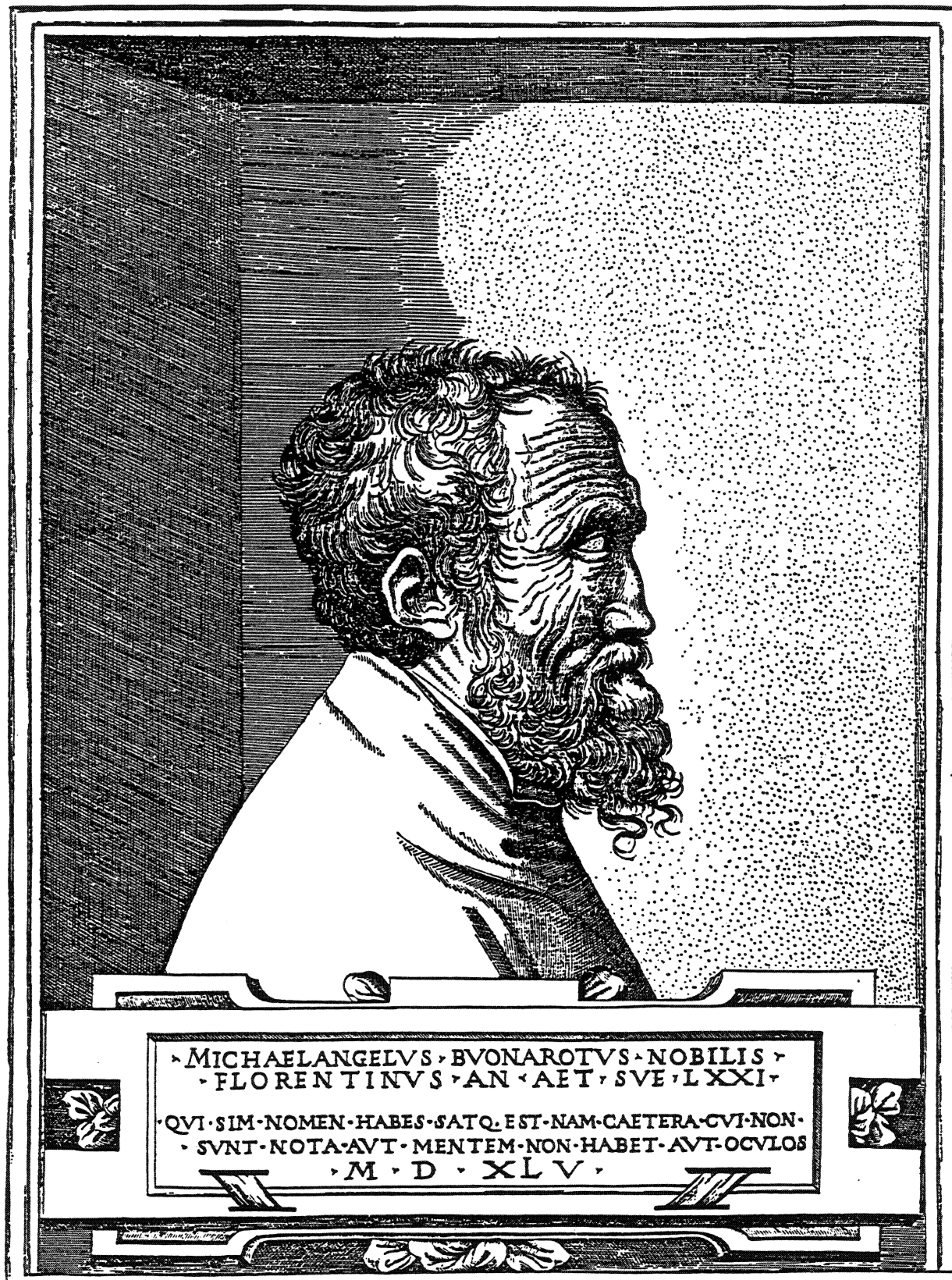
Several years later, another young sculptor came to this workshop. This remarkable young man had just been awarded a great honor by the government of Florence--he had been selected to sculpt a statue for the city square to be seen by all who entered the city. For this project, only the perfect marble piece would be good enough. The young man saw the towering white block of marble and asked the shopkeeper if he might use it for his statue. The shopkeeper laughed out loud and explained that the marble piece had been ruined; it was marred and certainly not suitable for anything as fine as the young sculptor intended to carve.

But the sculptor looked at the stone, surveyed all the sides and thought for several minutes. "This is the one I will use," said the young man. "It has great potential; you are only looking at the imperfection of this beautiful marble. I can see the statue that lays within." The shopkeeper laughed again at his choice of this useless piece of marble and called him a dreamer.

The young sculptor's name was Michelangelo, the greatest of the renaissance artists. He began work on the marred block of stone, and for two-and-a-half years he carved with a crude hammer and chisel. Many times he worked through the night with a candle attached to a hat as his only light. His finished work was named "David" (named for the biblical David who slew Goliath).

This magnificent sculpture stands 17 feet high and at first glance will take your breath away with its beauty. David stands with his weight on one foot and that slightly turns the torso so the gouge did not make a difference. Every year millions of people flock to Florence, Italy to enjoy Michelangelo's 500-year-old masterpiece. Fortunately, he looked past the obvious blemishes and saw the great potential of a block of marble.





Engraving, attributed to Giulio Bonarone, 1545.