

Florence. A thirteen-years-old boy is willing to learn a practical trade, as an artist. He likes to imitate the great Masters of sculpture and painting, going so far as to falsify them in order to gain some coins. He goes to school and gets, because of his talent, a punch in the face – breaking his nasal septum – from an envious fellow-student. This sounds like a good story for a novel of formation, worthy of Dickens or Collodi, but maybe it is more interesting because the main character is a real person, no less than the great Michelangelo Buonarroti.

It was in the year 1489 when the promising boy was sent, with some other contemporaries, to the garden "of the old curiosities" of San Marco in Florence, where Lorenzo de' Medici, the "Magnificent", entrusted the old but "very practical" master Bertoldo, ex-pupil of Donatello, to establish a school for young artists. In fact Lorenzo in those times used to complain of how hard it was to find a good sculptor while there were so many good painters in Florence.

Luckily he could get soon some good results, as he could experience himself: one day the young Michelangelo made a copy of a "stile antico" marble head of an old and wrinkled faun, which was insolently laughing showing the teeth and the tongue from the open mouth; Lorenzo saw the head and was pleasantly surprised but, just to tease the boy a little, he explained him how the old people "Never have all the teeth and some is always missing". Michelangelo then did not loose heart and suddenly broke away a tooth of the faun with a hammer blow, then took the drill and made a hole in its gum as if the tooth had just fallen out. As Lorenzo saw the sculpture again a loud laugh came out of him: not only he had a new funny story to tell his friends, but definitely he also had found a new talent. Touched by simplicity and the cunningness of the boy, the Magnificent Lorenzo decide o take him to heart, asking his father, Lodovico, to let the boy stay at his palace, receiving him among his sons. This is how it begun the career of the most talented sculptor ever, in the simple and pleasant setting of a nice garden.

Today the same garden, after many events during the centuries, is alive and open again, thanks to the efforts of these last months, after years of private and inaccessible use. The garden is the heart of the new extension of the Orto de' Medici Hotel (whose name means garden, according to this unrepeatabe heritage), including the reopening of the ground floor of the noble palace in San Gallo Road, where also some hidden, delicate 17th century frescos were rediscovered. Just in time before the 5th centenary celebration of the Sistine Chapel frescos, Florence can now discover another Michelangelo's place, which goes to integrate and complete the itinerary retracing Michelangelo's steps, just a stone's throw from the David and the Accademia Museum.

But what happened to Michelangelo in the Medici Garden of San Marco then? Because of his cleverness he became the darling of master Bertoldo and of the head-master Lorenzo, but somebody disliked these honors. His fellow-student Pietro Torrigiani, as Giorgio Vasari reports, was tired to see Michelangelo's skills better then his, so at the first occasion to fight, he rammed a fist in his face, smashing the nose and marking his face feature forever. We may think that fame, art and talent took the revenge against the event, but also Michelangelo himself had his own private revenge: ten years later, when the cardinal Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini asked him to rearrange his altar in the Cathedral of Siena, Michelangelo had not only to sculpture some new statues, but also to fix the ones sculptured a few years before by Pietro

Torrigiani, full of mistakes. In the end Michelangelo was the last to change a face feature, but definitely in a better way!