After breakfast, I would walk across a stone bridge into the old city and go through shaded narrow streets heavy with tourists and traffic and lined with shops. All through the month of July, I walked the streets of that city. From a Berlitz grammar, I taught myself tourist Italian. Walking through the Renaissance streets and squares, feeling against my feet the stone stairways and battlements of the Palazzo Vecchio and the Bargello, feeling against my face the cool damp faintly musty interiors of the Santa Croce and the Santa Trinità, gazing at the fresco of the *Last Judgment* on the Duomo and at the chancel beneath the huge dome where one Medici was wounded and another was killed—walking and tasting the sudden sun and shade of its streets, the dimness of its churches, the wealth of its galleries, the echoing savagery of its palaces and squares, I learned of the city's beauty and blood, of the Ghibellines and Guelphs, of the Pitti,the Strozzi, the Pazzi and the Medici, of Savonarola, of Dante and Machiavelli, of Giotto and da Vinci and Raphael and Michelangelo. Florence was a gift.

In the late afternoons, I would go back across the river along the covered Ponte Vecchio and gaze into the gold- and silversmith shops and watch the faces of merchants and shoppers and feel the coolness of the air beneath the roof of the bridge. I would walk the narrow streets to the house of the old woman and eat my supper and return to my room on the third floor of the hotel. From the window, I would watch the evening and the night come slowly across the city; watch the golden hue of the sun over the hills; watch the hills change hues and go slowly misty and soft; watch the darkness come into the sky and the lights of the city come to life in the slow falling of night. Those hours by that window in the evenings were of a loveliness I have never again felt in my life—hours in

a Renaissance city lived by a man born in a Brooklyn street, a man wearing a red beard and ritual fringes and a fisherman's cap.

I went to the Piazza del Duomo often in those weeks to see the Michelangelo *Pietà* and the Vasari fresco and the Ghiberti East Doors of the baptistery. I carried my sketchbook and drawing pencils wherever I went, but I remember that the first time I saw the Michelangelo *Pietà* in the Duomo I could not draw it. It was the fifth day of July. I stared at its Romanesque and Gothic contours, at the twisted arm and bent head, at the circle formed by Jesus and the two Marys, at the vertical of Nicodemus—I stared at the geometry of the stone and I felt the stone luminous with strange suffering and sorrow. I was an observant Jew, yet that block of stone moved through me like a cry, like the call of seagulls over morning surf, like—like the echoing blasts of the shofar sounded by the Rebbe. I do not mean to blaspheme. My frames of reference have been formed by the life I have lived. I do not know how a devout Christian reacts to that *Pietà*. I was only able to relate it to elements in my own lived past. I stared at it. I walked slowly around it. I do not remember how long I was there that first time. When I came back out into the brightness of the crowded square, I was astonished to discover that my eyes were wet.

I returned the next day and studied it again. Then I began to draw it. I drew its rhomboid contour. I drew each of its four people separately. I drew the heads separately. I drew the twisted arm. People stood behind me, watching. A long time later, I stopped drawing and walked back through the cool interior of the cathedral and out into the hot sun-flooded square.

In the square, between the cathedral and the baptistery, there was a traffic safety zone, a small island surrounded by a river of buses and cars. Often a man would stand in that safety zone feeding the pigeons of the square. He was an old man with a lined face and shrunken gums. He wore torn baggy trousers and a long-sleeved shirt. He stood in the island with his arms outstretched, palms turned upward. There was birdseed in his palms and the pigeons flocked to him, using him as they would a telephone pole or a tree, sitting on his arms and shoulders and waiting for a chance at the seed. He stood very still, smiling toothlessly, and tourists would snap his picture and drop a coin into thhe small cardboard box at his feet.

I came out of the Duomo that day after having spent hours drawing the *Pietà*, and there was the man with the pigeons on his arms. I watched him for a while, then opened my sketchbook and began to draw him. He reminded me vaguely of the fishermen of Provincetown. I felt people watching. I drew him quickly. “Hey, he’s good,” I heard someone say. When I was done, I closed the sketchbook and walked away.

I returned to the Duomo the following day, but the man with the pigeons was not there. I went into the cathedral and was there the rest of the morning, drawing the *Pietà*. When I came out of the cathedral, the square was hot with sunlight, and the man was there again, his arms covered with pigeons. I watched him for a while, then had some iced tea and began walking through the streets.

I walked to the Accademia. It was a long walk and I stopped often on the way and drew the people and the streets of the city. Inside the Accademia, I walked slowly through the long tapestry-lined hall to the

David. I stared at it and after a moment I walked away and leaned against a wall.

I did not draw it. I leaned against the wall and looked at it, then walked close to it and looked at it, then walked slowly around it. It stood bathed in the sunlight that poured down upon it through the dome overhead, a white marble giant that dominated the space around it and was its own frozen dimension. I looked and I did not draw, and finally I came away and went into the street.

I began to walk quickly. I came to a narrow street and rested for a while in the shade of stone houses. The street was crowded. I felt tired. I walked a while longer, then took a cab back to my room. I lay down on the bed in my clothes and slept. After about an hour, I woke feeling hot and faintly dizzy. I washed my face in cold water and went back outside. I walked across the Ponte Vecchio and wandered about the city. I went past the Uffizi and found it had closed at four o'clock. It was almost six. I went quickly back across the bridge to the house of the old woman. She served me supper, then sat in an old leather chair reading from her Book of Psalms. I watched her for a while, then did a rapid drawing of her. She did not see me.

The next day, I drew her again. I drew her looking younger this time, sitting with the Book of Psalms on her lap. In my room, I looked closely at the drawing and found it vaguely resembled my mother. I stared at the drawing, then tore it from my sketchbook and threw it away.

The following morning, I returned to the Accademia and stood for more than an hour drawing the *David*. I drew the head, with the eyes that

reflected the decision to enter the arena of power; I drew the huge veined hands that would soon kill; I drew the shouldered sling being lifted in preparation for the delivery of death. The little man with the broken nose had created this sculpture in an act of awesome rebellion against his tradition and his teacher. Other *David*s I had seen were small in size and represented David after the battle. This *David* was a giant and represented the decision to enter the battle. The little Italian had effected a spatial and temporal shift that had changed the course of art.

I spent almost the entire morning in the Accademia drawing the *David*. Then I walked to the Duomo. The man with the pigeons was in the square. I drew the bent head of the *Pietà*. I spent the afternoon in the Uffizi.

That night, my mythic ancestor returned after a lengthy absence. But he was less thunderous than he had ever been before and did not wake me from my sleep.