



Da Vinci's Tiger

L. M. ELLIOTT

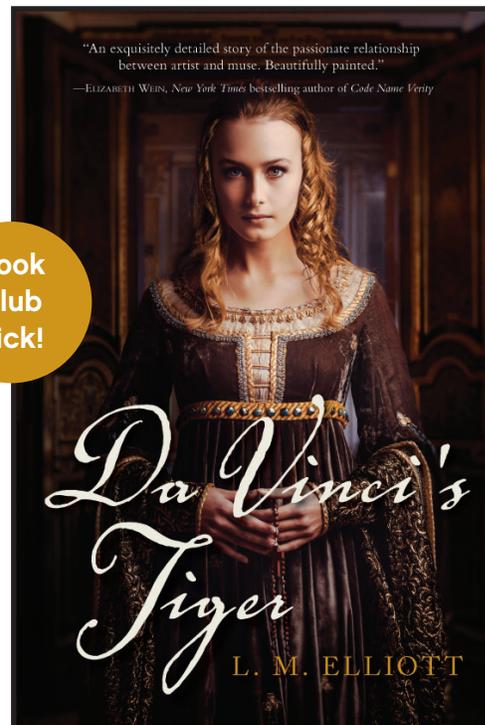
About the Book

Ginevra de' Benci longs to take part in the artistic ferment of Renaissance Florence. But as the daughter of a wealthy family in a society dictated by men, she is trapped in an arranged marriage, expected to limit her creativity to domestic duties. Her poetry reveals her deepest feelings, and she aches to share her work, to meet painters and sculptors mentored by the famed Lorenzo de Medici, and to find love.

When Venetian ambassador, Bernardo Bembo, arrives in Florence, he introduces Ginevra to a dazzling circle of patrons, artists, and philosophers—a world of thought and conversation she has yearned for. She is instantly attracted to the handsome newcomer, who admires her mind as well as her beauty. Yet Ginevra is unsure of his intentions. Choosing her as his Platonic muse, Bembo commissions a portrait by a young Leonardo da Vinci. Posing for the brilliant painter inspires an intimate connection between them—one Ginevra can only begin to understand. In a world of exquisite art, elaborate feasts, and exhilarating jousts, she faces many temptations to discover her voice, artistic companionship, and a love that defies categorization. In the end, she and Leonardo are caught up in a dangerous and deadly battle between powerful families.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the typical role of an Italian woman in the late fifteenth century. How did society expect them to behave? Does Ginevra fit into that mold? Does Simonetta? Discuss.
2. What did “platonic love” mean in Renaissance Florence? How is that different from today? Do you agree that characters in *Da Vinci's Tiger* used it to gain political allies rather than to pursue personal desires? Why or why not?
3. Why do the men decide to commission artworks for their “platonic loves”? What purpose would that serve in the long run? Explain.
4. Compare and contrast Verrocchio and Leonardo's approach to depicting Ginevra's portrait. Besides the mediums that they use, how do they differ? How are they similar? Do you agree with Leonardo's idea that painting is a superior medium to sculpture? How a painting is able “to convey [an] intense reaction...to the world” better than a sculpture can (p. 149). Why or why not?
5. What does Abbess Scolastica mean when she tells Ginevra to “Sing of yourself. Sing of us” (p. 83)?
6. Why is Leonardo's painting of Ginevra “revolutionary” and “uncommon” during that time? Why is it so shocking that a woman be depicted within nature? What was Leonardo trying to accomplish in her portrait?
7. Why was Leonardo arrested? Who do you think dropped the letter into the tamburi?
8. Briefly explain the overall political and historical tensions between the Medici and Pazzi families. How did it affect Ginevra's life?
9. Why does Ginevra use the image of a mountain tiger to describe herself on page 204? How is it applicable to her and the life she has lived? Why does she include it in her verse, “I beg your pardon, I am a mountain tiger”?
10. Why did Leonardo change Bernardo's motto from *Virtus et Honor to Virtutem Forma Decorat* (“She adorns her virtue with beauty”) in Ginevra's painting?
11. Have you ever had a muse in your own life or been someone's? How did either experience affect you?
12. What was the biggest obstacle in Ginevra's life? What is the hardest choice she has to make? What might you have done in her position? Would you call Ginevra a budding feminist?
13. What do you think of the ending? Do you find it happy or sad?
14. The Renaissance was a time of phenomenal growth in art, creative thought, pageantry, and writing. After reading this novel, would you want to live then? Why or why not?



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