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Da Vinci's Tiger



Synopsis

For fans of rich and complex historical novels like *Girl with a Pearl Earring* or *Code Name Verity*, Laura Malone Elliott delivers the stunning tale of real-life Renaissance woman Ginevra de' Benci, the inspiration for one of Leonardo da Vinci's earliest masterpieces. The young and beautiful daughter of a wealthy family, Ginevra longs to share her poetry and participate in the artistic ferment of Renaissance Florence but is trapped in an arranged marriage in a society dictated by men. The arrival of the charismatic Venetian ambassador, Bernardo Bembo, introduces Ginevra to a dazzling circle of patrons, artists, and philosophers. Bembo chooses Ginevra as his Platonic muse and commissions a portrait of her by a young Leonardo da Vinci. Posing for the brilliant painter inspires an intimate connection between them, one Ginevra only begins to understand. In a rich and vivid world of exquisite art with a dangerous underbelly of deadly political feuds, Ginevra faces many challenges to discover her voice and artistic companionship—and to find love.

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Customer Reviews

Based on the muse for one of Leonardo DaVinci's early paintings, *DaVinci's Tiger* is a historical fiction book with a feminist twist. In a time when women were seen as property of their fathers

and husbands, Ginevra de Benci Niccolini yearns to be more than a pretty face. Encouraged by her father and the nuns at her boarding school to learn Latin, literature, and philosophy, she is able to discuss artwork with her social circle, which includes the Medicis who control the banks and the artists they fund, which include Verrocchio and his apprentice, DaVinci. When the ambassador from Venice, Bernardo Bembo, declares her his a Platonic muse and commissions a painting of her to be done by Leonardo DaVinci, she and DaVinci decide to make this painting different from the standard. Based on the one line of poetry she wrote that survived the centuries, "I beg your pardon, I am a mountain tiger," Ginevra comes to life in this book as a politically savvy yet strong, morally-sound woman ahead of her time. I loved this book for its historical background and strong feminist undertones throughout the story. Many of Ginevra's words made me think and have stuck with me long after reading this book. I am definitely going to reread this a few more times to enjoy and think about some more. I gave this 5 out of 5 stars on Goodreads.

Awesome read! Captured my attention on page one and my heart by the middle of the book. I was spellbound by the author's incredible ability to describe a world so far in the past - through her astonishing research abilities, she brought the characters to life in this wonderful book as she has in all of her previous historical fiction novels. Can't wait for her next book!

I can't really say much about this book.....because nothing happened. I only finished it to get closer to my reading challenge.

Great story!

Great book!

great story

I love art, historical fiction, and Renaissance Italy so how could I possibly resist Da Vinci's Tiger? With a premise that evoked loving memories of Sharon Biggs Waller's A Mad, Wicked Folly - arguably my favorite historical fiction title to date - this book shot up to the top of my to read list. And I am very, very pleased with it. Right away, what struck me upon reading Da Vinci's Tiger is how well-written and well-researched it is. This makes all the difference in historical fiction to me.

You could tell from the first page that Elliott really knew what she was writing about. By reading the author's note at the end, you'll get a sense of how accurate her version of history is. That's a wonderful thing to behold. I was sucked into the setting and the lives of the characters instantly. Just after reading the prologue, I messaged friends saying this was bound to be GOOD. Elliott weaves her own version of history around the lives of Ginevra de' Benci, Leonardo Da Vinci, Bernardo Bembo, and Lorenzo de' Medici. They live the lives of the Florentine elite, where the clothes must be fancy, the parties must reek of excess, and there's a societal philosophical movement that's food for the soul. Ginevra has been stuck married to an older merchant, but she catches the eye of the Venetian ambassador, Bernardo Bembo, who wants her to become his Platonic muse. The Florentine people hold to strict ideals and are definitely more pious than most. A Platonic muse (or "friend") is not a sexual arrangement. The most wealthy and powerful men find muses that inspire honor, morals, and virtue and believe that by spending time in their presence (with their beauty and grace) they themselves will be blessed in their lives and upon their deaths. I didn't really know about this concept beforehand, but I loved how complex and intriguing the cultural tradition was. There's obviously a lot to say about the double standards between the sexes and the repression females face in their behavior and Ginevra comments on all of them in her narrations, so don't fear. But being a Platonic muse also gives her more access to the high society folk to see how policies and decisions are made. It's more interesting than running a household, for sure. Given that the story takes place in high society, expect enough events to fully draw you into the mystique of the time period. There are balls, jousting tournaments, horse races, philosophical poetry discussions, and finally art commissions. Yes, the title doesn't mention Da Vinci for nothing. The master himself plays a prominent role in the story as a young artist, just starting out, who manages to be commissioned by Bernardo to paint Ginevra's portrait. Through their sessions together, he encourages her intelligence and independence, and she inspires him to take risks in his art, leading to some of the revolutionary techniques he is so well known for. Those scenes were magical and inspiring, and their friendship was beautiful. I guess what kept me from really being fully in love with this book is that there's not really a romance to root for. Ginevra is obviously in a loveless marriage, and although Bernardo is very much interested in her to become his Platonic muse, she never really seems to feel anything for him either. She's flattered by his interest, and she sees that their arrangement provides

her with benefits that she otherwise wouldn't have as a married woman. But there's no real love there, and Bernado creeped me out more than once. (In my head I kind of pictured a skeezy old dude throwing himself at a 17 year old, so, yeah, no.) The most interesting person that vaguely attracted my shipping sensibilities would be Leonardo himself, but that ship never actually sets sail. So yeah, no romantic flutterings to set my heart on fire, but at the same time I don't feel like I can really fault the book for that. It did remain historically accurate, and as a feminist tale within the restrictions of Renaissance Florence, I feel like the story was definitely strong. I just think I was so focused on getting some romance here or there that I got distracted from the feminist storyline or that that part of the book wasn't emphasized enough. Certainly, the ending could have done a bit more to show Ginevra's breaking free of the societal restrictions and expectations. That, I feel, was a missed opportunity.

Summing Up: I want more historical fiction like Da Vinci's Tiger: well-written, excellently researched, dripping in historical accuracy, and with a beautiful evocative setting. The hopeless romantic in me would have liked the prospect of a ship and some wonderful kissing, but this book serves well as a feminist tale in a really restrictive portion of history. And all of the art and getting a glimpse of the beginnings of Leonardo da Vinci was a wonderful, inspiring bonus. Definitely a great read.

Recommended To: Fans of feminist, well-written historical fiction. A Mad, Wicked Folly is a good parallel.*An electronic advance review copy was provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the contents of the review.

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