





Book I:

# Mon Salai

The True Story of the Mona Lisa

# Introduction

It comes as no surprise that men of lofty genius are often misunderstood. Without a doubt this proves to be the case with Leonardo da Vinci, whose work has inspired generations of artists, scientists, and inventors, and still continues to captivate minds today.

Da Vinci is directly responsible for restoring the intrinsic connection between art and science to its rightful place in society. He left behind a myriad of notebooks filled with designs of flying machines, armored cars, self-propelled vehicles, diving suits, machine guns, parachutes, and even robots, over five hundred years ago, not to mention, his paintings are by far some of the most renowned works in the history of art. Giorgio Vasari, known to many as the world's first true art historian, said of him, "His every action was so divine, that, surpassing all other men, it made itself clearly known as a thing bestowed by God, and not acquired by human art." And truly it was so, as there seemed no limit

to the inventions Leonardo's imagination could conjure up.

It's as if he was sent from the future to help speed the pace of evolution. Maybe even dropped off here by some unknown alien civilization. But the simple truth is, he remained ever, as a child, constantly exploring new worlds beyond his own, with experience as his guide and teacher. His insatiable curiosity was like an unquenchable fire, devouring knowledge, as fire devours air. He is always to be remembered as the ultimate Renaissance man, and now, finally, his mysteries have been revealed for all the world to see.

One day, Leonardo was walking in the street when he saw a beautiful young man about age ten passing by. This young man by the name of Gian Giacomo Caprotti would come to live with the master as his assistant that same year in 1490. Officially, he was sort of like a servant more than a pupil and Leonardo took him in largely because of his "ravishing grace and beauty" -Vasari notes.



Leonardo was immensely fond of Giacomo and took him everywhere he went. He must of taken the boy in to use him as a model for his paintings. Now Giacomo was a trouble child, Leonardo even nicknamed him Salai(meaning demon or limb of satan) after the Burlesque epic *Il Morgante Maggiore*, by Luigi Pulci because of all the mischief he caused. He would steal from da Vinci's pupils and the master himself. Leonardo even writes down in one of many instances in his notes that Salai was "a thief, a glutton, obstinate and greedy," nevertheless he never parted from da Vinci's company.

It seems their relationship was quite intimate, but one cannot determine to what extent by the writing left behind in the notebooks. One thing is for sure, the Mona Lisa was imparted to Salai in Leonardo's will. A painting Leonardo would carry with him from its inception up until his death. Not only that, but Leonardo mentions Salai more than any other person in his notebooks. It is my attempt to reveal what the writing cannot tell us about Leonardo's beloved

model, servant and possible lover, Salai. there exists an inherent “persona” that each artist unconsciously renders into their paintings, this can be evidenced by things like faces that end up resembling the painter, or bodies that appear more like the shape of the painter rather than the model who was painted etc... Da Vinci knew this fact and he purposely tried to stray away from this inevitability by putting aside his own “persona” when he painted. This was something unique to him given he was a man of science, and he would go on to write discourses on the nature of light to aid him in representing the subject matter in his paintings as real as humanly possible. It seems as though he stepped out of the impurity of his mind(memory, feelings, experiences, perception, etc...) and looked upon nature as she truly is, with all her wonderful little idiosyncrasies. The Mona Lisa, for example, is the first and last attempt by any artist trying to achieve the perfection of the human eye. Something 21st century

technology has yet to replicate given the advent of cameras, tv's and computers. This is most likely the cause for the painting's popularity, as millions upon millions of people flock to see it up close. It is, after all, the most famous painting in the world. But it holds a secret, unnoticed for centuries, cleverly masked behind the smoky veil of darkness that is nature, revealing nothing of herself through dull symbolisms, objects of meaning, knowledge of any kind, or dire human thinking.