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*Dramatic Publishing*

**LIVE DRAWING**  
*A Portrait of the Mona Lisa*

By  
JULES TASCA



**Dramatic Publishing**  
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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Dedicated  
to the  
Marriage  
of  
Lauren and Joel

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# LIVE DRAWING

## *A Portrait of the Mona Lisa*

A Full-length Play  
For 1 Man and 1 woman

### CHARACTERS

LEONARDO DA VINCI. . . . . the artist

LISA GIOCONDA. . . . . the subject

FRANCESCO GIOCONDA. . . . . Lisa's husband

*Live Drawing* is a play for two actors. Under no circumstances is permission given for a third actor to play Francesco.

TIME: 1503.

PLACE: Florence, Italy.

# LIVE DRAWING

## *A Portrait of the Mona Lisa*

*(The house lights dim. We hear a lute play a Renaissance melody. It is a melody we shall hear later when LEONARDO plays and sings. The stage lights come up on the studio of Leonardo da Vinci. On stage are sketches, half-finished canvasses, maps, paint brushes, easels, what appears to be a flying machine, a skull, a model of a horse, an hourglass and a lute or stringed instrument.)*

*We see LEONARDO, a man in his fifties, wearing a velvet robe, pacing impatiently. After a beat, he crosses to his hourglass and seeing that it has done its time, he reverses the glass to begin the sand falling again.)*

LEONARDO (*addressing the audience*). I am not just some artisan! I am Leonardo da Vinci. You've heard about me, so I won't bother you with my accomplishments. I wait here for a woman. This woman, this nouveau riche princess, has kept me waiting for more than an hour! As if I were her dressmaker! I tell you this: the sand in every woman's hourglass is mud and does not move for them! They traipse through a parallel world where time is not a phenomenon. Dawdling and dally-

ing, looking for a misplaced glove or scarf or shoe are not flaws in this parenthetical timeless world within our own. No! Not flaws, but a way of life! A man is just some damned seething thing, a fool who waits and waits and waits and is berated if he tires of the wait!

*(A beautiful young woman enters. She wears a period dress. This is LISA Gioconda.)*

LISA. Excuse me, sir.

LEONARDO. Who are you?

LISA. You were talking to yourself, sir, so I was hesitant to interrupt you.

LEONARDO. I often talk to myself, young Lady, when I seek to engage a superior mind. *(A beat as LEONARDO regards her.)*

LISA. You're staring, sir. Is there something wrong?

LEONARDO. You...I presume that you are *not* Francesco Gioconda's wife. The Lady Lisa Gioconda.

LISA. I am.

LEONARDO. Does Joshua stop the sun for you?

LISA. Sir?

LEONARDO. Time is flung

    When one is young

    But time is gold

    When one is old.

You look quizzical, my lady. Do you realize that I have turned this glass three times? That you are an hour and a half late?

LISA. Time's a servant, sir, not a master.

LEONARDO. I am a master. And I will *not* be kept waiting. Is that understood?



LISA. Sir, I am here to have my portrait painted. I needed time to prepare the face to meet the painter's eye.

LEONARDO. My lady, your face is already painted. All we need to do is press a cloth to you as Saint Veronica did and we'd have a gaudy likeness. *(He tries to wipe her face with a cloth. She throws it aside.)*

LISA. You're insulting. They all say that about you.

LEONARDO. Who?

LISA. The talk is that you're impatient and demanding, except when you're angling for a commission. Well, sir, I am a lady and I will not be pinched between your barbed words. I don't care how esteemed your reputation is.

LEONARDO. Being late is a subtle insult to him who waits and—who is that nun out there on my bench rubbing raw her rosary beads?

LISA. Sister Camilla. She's here to chaperone. My husband said I should be accompanied by a sister.

LEONARDO. Are you sure he didn't send her because he knows that after meeting you, I shall need all the prayers that fly to heaven?

LISA. My prayer, sir, is that your artistic skill is as sharp as your orneriness.

LEONARDO. Sharper, my lady.

LISA. Sir...

LEONARDO. Stop calling me sir! I can't paint a woman calling me sir! I'm Leonardo.

LISA. Leonardo...sir...what is it that you require of me today? Would you like me to sit? Would you like me to stand? Would you like me to kneel at your feet?

LEONARDO. A feral cat is loose in here. As soon as I chase it out of doors, I'll answer that.

LISA. I'm sorry. I've never had my portrait done.

LEONARDO. Let the education then begin. The next time you come, wash the greasy make-up from your cheeks and lips.

LISA. Wash the greasy make-up...

LEONARDO. Yes. I'd like to meet you in person.

LISA. Sir... Sir...I wear the most expensive make-up creams and rouges to be found in Florence, for that matter in all of Italy.

LEONARDO. You should've left some for the other women in the country.

LISA. Sir...what is this dislike of me?

LEONARDO. No dislike. I'm the painter. You're the subject. Do as I instruct the next time that you come.

LISA. If there is a next time, sir! I take it this time, you will not even begin a sketch?

LEONARDO. No. I never render anything on the first visit.

LISA. No?

LEONARDO. No. On the first visit, I merely like to establish a favorable rapport with my subject.

LISA. Well, now that you've done that, I'll say farewell.

*(LISA exits in a huff. LEONARDO crosses down and addresses the audience.)*

LEONARDO. Leonardo... Why?...why have I made wild waves of this girl's calm sea. I must analyze my angers. Yes. When emotion tops good sense what comes is but wasted seed... *(Lights change.)* This all began one day when I sat and sketched soldiers who passed the time in the Palazzo Vecchio. *(LEONARDO sits with a sketch*

*pad and draws.)* Her husband, one Francesco Gioconda, approached me...

*(The actress playing LISA dressed in a man's jacket and hat enters. This is FRANCESCO Gioconda.)*

FRANCESCO. Excuse me, sir. Good day.

LEONARDO. Good day.

FRANCESCO. My name is Francesco Gioconda.

LEONARDO. I am...

FRANCESCO. Leonardo da Vinci. I know. Several of my colleagues over by the cathedral there pointed you out to me. Leonardo da Vinci, the brilliant.

LEONARDO. You stepped over here to stand in the light of brilliance for what reason, sir?

FRANCESCO. For a good reason, sir.

LEONARDO. Let me be the judge of your reason.

FRANCESCO. Well, firstly, I've seen your work in Milan and I am in awe of you.

LEONARDO. You have the better of me there, Sir Gioconda. In my morning mirror glance, there is no awe.

FRANCESCO. But you play modest, sir.

LEONARDO. I do not play modest. I am too talented to fool anyone.

FRANCESCO *(laughs)*. Pray tell, what does a renowned man like you hold in awe?

LEONARDO. Only beauty, sir.

FRANCESCO. Not truth?

LEONARDO. What truth is not beautiful?

FRANCESCO. Beauty... Yes...an artist would. Then you will be pleased that I sought you out this day.

LEONARDO. I wait impatiently to find out why.

FRANCESCO. As I said, I am Francesco Gioconda...

LEONARDO. The livestock merchant. I've heard of you.

FRANCESCO. Good God, why would you have heard of me?

LEONARDO. Your name is renowned in every slaughterhouse in Tuscany, sir.

FRANCESCO. What does an artist know about slaughterhouses?

LEONARDO. I study the anatomy of animals. Where else do they cut them apart?

FRANCESCO. I see. Then you're aware that I'm highly skilled, sir, at knowing how to breed cattle for maximum profit. I've made my fortune in this business.

LEONARDO. Congratulations, sir, on turning untold numbers of living things into wealth. But if you'll excuse me now...

FRANCESCO. Not so fast please, sir. I have an offer to make.

LEONARDO. Which is?

FRANCESCO. I'd like to commission you to do a portrait.

LEONARDO. I'm sorry. I'm on a commission now to do a fresco of the Battle of Anghiari. As we speak, I sketch soldiers in the square here.

FRANCESCO. Four hundred gold florins.

LEONARDO. Four hundred?

FRANCESCO. Yes. You see money is no object.

LEONARDO. It is a good attitude for a well-to-do. A man never spends more than when he hoards his wealth.

FRANCESCO. And 400 florins has turned your head.

LEONARDO. Actually, sir, it is my stomach that turns. I am in need of funds to eat.

FRANCESCO. So it seems we need each other. When I asked around and said that I wanted the premier artist in Italy to do the portrait, your name dripped from the lips of everyone with an inflection of reverence that people use when speaking the pope's name, Leonardo da Vinci...Leonardo da Vinci... Oh, yes, you must engage master Leonardo...

LEONARDO. Hmm...

FRANCESCO. Do I take it that you are considering?

LEONARDO. Perhaps I can work it in, since the city council is always behind with the payments for the fresco...

FRANCESCO. Then I will be delighted to have the portrait and help the artist.

LEONARDO. Step over here and allow me to look at you.

FRANCESCO. Oh, no, sir. It is not myself I want you to paint.

LEONARDO. Not yourself?

FRANCESCO. No. It's my wife, Lisa.

LEONARDO. Oh, I'm sorry...I thought...

FRANCESCO. No. No. No. Who'd ever hang this face on the wall of a grand estate? It's a common face that serves as cover for a common man. No. But, Leonardo, my wife, Lisa...

LEONARDO. Lisa...

FRANCESCO. Ah yes, Lisa. There's a beauty to revere, the beauty that you spoke of earlier. At night sometime when she's asleep, I stand at the foot of her bed and take pleasure in looking at her. It is a sacrilegious adoration. She's twenty-four. I still can't believe I won such a prize. No. No. I can't...

LEONARDO. Twenty-four?

FRANCESCO. Yes. And I want her portrait, so that when she ages, people will look and marvel and say, that is the beauty that Francesco Gioconda married.

LEONARDO. Only twenty-four...

FRANCESCO. I know. I know. I'm much older. I was married twice before Lisa. But none could compare with her. What a beauty.

LEONARDO. Now you've made me downright curious, sir. As a good salesman should, you're making me feel that if I didn't take this commission, I'd be missing something.

FRANCESCO. I guarantee you are, sir.

LEONARDO. So let us agree to the project.

FRANCESCO. Two hundred florins down and the other two hundred when the portrait is completed.

LEONARDO. Sounds fair.

FRANCESCO. It is.

LEONARDO. I will send my apprentice, John, to inform you when the Lady Gioconda may come to my studio.

FRANCESCO. You make me happy beyond expression. Not even a good wine is as heady as this moment. *(They shake hands. FRANCESCO exits.)*

LEONARDO *(to the audience)*. There is money in being renowned. We mine our reputations shamelessly. But at this moment, I am in need of money. The great Leonardo doing a merchant's wife. Every man thinks his wife is beautiful. Remember this, Francesco passes his days in the company of cows and bulls. When he comes home, anything that doesn't moo or charge at him looks good. But I'll paint the poor soul. Damned patronage. Being an artist is an immense suffering...

*(Lights change. LEONARDO goes off. A spot comes up on FRANCESCO at R.)*

FRANCESCO. I had discovered that the Public Works Commission of Florence who set Leonardo to work on the frescos in the council hall were not forthcoming with funding, so I sought him out...

*(A spotlight comes up on LEONARDO at L.)*

LEONARDO. This cow salesman who goes about purchasing the world had purchased me and my name. Look, I saw him as merely a quick 400 florins...

FRANCESCO. Don't you see, aristocratic families all vied for Leonardo to paint their women. No less a grand lady as Isabella d'Este begged him...

LEONARDO. The reason I was so angry the day Lisa Gioconda arrived at my studio, the real blood blister to my felicity, came when those eyes captured her face! How beautiful!

FRANCESCO. Before anyone else found out that Leonardo da Vinci had been drained of money, I shoved my offer in his face. *(He shakes his purse.)* Even geniuses have to eat.

LEONARDO. When she smiled, I knew I had to make nature's masterpiece my own. The instant she etched her figure on this brain, I knew that there would be nothing quick about my rendition of her.

FRANCESCO. As a general knows when to attack, a businessman must know when to buy. Thus I have the master Leonardo in my employ! *(The spotlight fades on FRANCESCO.)*

LEONARDO. In my haste to swallow 400 gold florins, I'd trapped myself in a major work! Don't you understand?  
*I would've paid money to paint her!*

*(As the light fades on LEONARDO, a spot comes up on LISA, at C.)*

LISA. No one believes that Francesco could contract *the* Leonardo to paint me. That first day I went to him, I prepared myself as if it were my wedding day. Powdered and perfumed and arranged, I planned to sit demurely with an attractive coyness for this master of the brush. I thought he'd be gentle and accommodating—differential even since, after all, I've risen from a poor man's daughter to something of a lady. Instead we argued. I must try to use some tact next time...

*(The spotlight fades on LISA. The lights come up on LEONARDO's studio. LISA, wearing a veil, paces the floor this time. After a beat LEONARDO enters.)*

LISA. Good morning, sir.

LEONARDO. Today you're early.

LISA. I have no make-up on. I never realized why men are timely and women seem to always be tardy.

LEONARDO. Seem?... There is sophistry in my lady.

LISA. No. Men don't make up. God gives them beards to plume their faces. In the morning they clear the night's dream dust from their eyes and they become who they are. Today, I just washed in warm water and put on a veil, so no one would see my naked face. *(LEONARDO lifts the veil.)*



LEONARDO. Step over here. Let me look at you...

Hmm... Hmm... Hmm...

LISA. I'd like to apologize for the poor beginning of our relationship.

LEONARDO. It was principally my rage standing on its hind legs. So our mutual apologies cancel that harsh opening scene.

LISA. I should have apologized immediately. But I didn't. I have moods sometimes.

LEONARDO. All intelligent people have complex moods. (*Looking at her face.*) Hmm... Hmm...

LISA. What do you see, sir?... Leonardo?...

LEONARDO. Applying make-up to this would be akin to painting a cardinal red... The bones...the symmetry... the proportionality...

LISA. What are you saying, the bones, the symmetry, the proportionality?

LEONARDO. My Lady Lisa, I speak of the architectonics of the human face.

LISA. I want to know what that means.

LEONARDO. I could tell you, but it would bore you.

LISA. No. Tell me... Sir, please...a lady should know things...I am not a peasant...

LEONARDO. My lady, you could never be a peasant. Beauty makes one, ipso facto, an aristocrat of humanity.

LISA. It does? An aristocrat of humanity? I love the way you put things... Excuse me for being so vain.

LEONARDO. What is beauty, my lady, but the music to which vanity dances.

LISA. Who said that?

LEONARDO. I did.

LISA. Oh, I keep forgetting.