



The Lion, The King and the Pope

Exactly five hundred years ago, in France, there was a king who was very young, very tall, had a very long nose, and was so French that his name was Francois!

And in Rome there was a pope, twice his age and very fat, who was called Leo and was as powerful as a lion.

King Francois and Pope Leo were at war, and were constantly provoking each other, sending out their soldiers to conquer or defend their lands and possessions.

For kings and popes to fight was entirely normal, in those days, and the war had gone on for years and even centuries, with lulls or new outbreaks, depending on who was king or pope at the time.

However, more than making war, what both the king and the pope really liked was art.

Oh, how that pair of despots would have liked to be able to paint or sculpt or create extraordinary works like the great artists of the time!

And of all the artists of the period, the best, as people still agree today, was Leonardo.

THE LION, THE KING AND THE POPE

Leonardo da Vinci was a sixty years old, with a bushy beard and a bad temper. But first and foremost, he was a brilliant and ingenious artist, who could invent anything under the sun: flying machines, bicycles, bridges, canals... or anything else you can think of.

I'm an artist of fame

and Leonardo is my name.

I'm an artist, that's true

-and an inventor, that too.

If there was one thing Leonardo wanted or than any other, it was for Pope Leo, whom he had known since he was young man, to commission an amazing work of art from him. So he paid him a visit, and he said, very obsequiously:

“I’m convinced that Rome would be a far more beautiful city if you would let me make a really impressive castle, a truly original bridge and a dozen murals. Oh, go on, pleeeeeease...”

The Pope replied:

“You don’t do things by halves, do you, Leonardo! And how much would you charge me, to make all these marvels you have in mind?”

“Well, a lot and then some more, multiplied by twelve! I’m the best and Rome deserves my art!”

“Mmmm! In that case, I fear Rome will have none of the things you propose, because I don’t have any money right now, and the little I have, I have to spend on the war with the King of France! So - ciao! ”

And it’s true that the war between the king and the pope was raging: Boom, boom! Clash, crash! Bam, bam! Cannonballs flying this way and that way...

But no-one was more furious than Leonardo, who flew into a rage as only he could, because he was very bad-tempered, and decided that if the Pope didn't want him to work in Rome, he would work for his enemy, the young King Francois of France. Yah!

So he packed his bags and his plans, and off to France he went...

King Francois received Leonardo with open arms. They became great friends and made jokes about each other’s beards and their noses, always a sure sign of friendship.

Leonardo felt very much at home in France, and plunged himself into making stunning creations that left the king and all his court gaping in amazement.

And meanwhile, on and on, clash-crash, clash-crash, boom boom, the war between the pope and the king of France went on. It went on, and it became very tedious, and everyone was sick of it.

So finally, the day came when King Francois and Pope Leo decided to make peace. About time too!

The king thought that the best way to prove to the pope that he wasn’t angry and that he really did want to make peace, was to give him a splendid gift. And he asked his great friend Leonardo to think up something really original. So Leonardo spent day after day surrounded by cogwheels and gears, wondering what kind of present he could invent.

*-I'm an artist of fame
and inventing is my game.
-I'm a genius at heart
and an inventor, from the start, from the start.*

And so it was that on the 19th of December, 1515, when Pope Leo and King Francois and the rest of his court met in Bologna, the doors flew open and everyone backed away in terror...

There was a lion in the room!

It was every inch a lion, from its mane to its tail, and it advanced towards the Pope, and when it was standing before him, and the Pope was trembling with fear, it stopped - and...

... oh, what a sight! From inside the lion, out burst a bouquet of blue and white flowers, as a token of peace.

“Ooooooh! Marvellous!” exclaimed the Pope, who had never seen anything like it. “This can only be the work of Leonardo da Vinci.”

Because in fact, the lion was an automaton, an exceptional, original and incredibly clever automaton, which only a genius like Leonardo could have invented and built, and used so that the great powers of this world would, poetically, make peace.

Hooray for Leonardo!

*-I'm an artist of fame
and inventing is my game.*

*-I'm an artist of fame
and Leonardo's my name. ... Leonardo's my name...*

Script: Teresa Duran