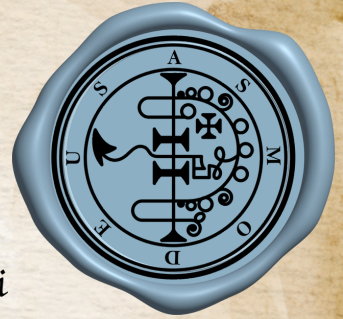


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IA-JR-291044



Presiding: His Infernal Highness Asmodeus, Prince of Lust

Territorial Jurisdiction: Leviathan, Prince of Envy

In re: Contarini v. Zorzi

Concerning the Alleged Theft and Seduction of Lucia Bellandi Contarini

Claimant: Domenico Contarini, Senator of the Most Serene Republic of San Marco

Respondent: Matteo Zorzi, merchant and member of the Venetian patriciate

Principal Party in Interest: Donna Lucia Bellandi

Case Summary: Claimant Senator Domenico Contarini alleges that Respondent Matteo Zorzi unlawfully seduced and induced the departure of Claimant's lawful wife, Donna Lucia Bellandi Contarini, thereby depriving Claimant of his marital rights and violating the terms of an existing Infernal compact governing the Contarini household. Claimant seeks the return of his wife, enforcement of said compact, and judgment against Respondent for interference with property, marriage, and contracted rights.

Disposition: Complaint dismissed.

Supplemental Rulings: See detailed notes.

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Claimant's Position:

Claimant Senator Domenico Contarini asserts that Respondent Matteo Zorzi knowingly and deliberately pursued an improper relationship with Donna Lucia Bellandi Contarini despite full knowledge of her lawful marriage and the Infernal compact governing the Contarini household. Claimant alleges that Respondent encouraged Donna Lucia to abandon the marital residence and thereafter continued to harbor and maintain relations with her, thereby depriving Claimant of the companionship, fidelity, and other rights secured to him by marriage and compact. Claimant maintains that Donna Lucia remains his lawful wife and seeks her return to the Contarini household, enforcement of the existing compact, and judgment against Respondent for unlawful interference with Claimant's marital and contracted rights.

Respondent's Position:

Respondent Matteo Zorzi acknowledges his relationship with Donna Lucia Bellandi Contarini but denies having abducted, compelled, enchanted, bargained for, or otherwise coerced her departure from the Contarini household. Respondent maintains that Donna Lucia left Claimant voluntarily and entered into the relationship with Respondent of her own choosing. Respondent further asserts that no provision of the Contarini Infernal compact binds Donna Lucia's affection or desire to Claimant, and therefore no enforceable right secured under Infernal law has been taken or infringed. Respondent requests dismissal of Claimant's allegations and recognition of Donna Lucia's voluntary departure from the marital household.

Senator Contarini asserted that Respondent Zorzi had deliberately pursued Donna Lucia despite full knowledge of her marriage and had encouraged her to abandon the Contarini household. Respondent did not dispute the relationship but denied coercion, maintaining that Donna Lucia departed of her own volition.

The Claimant repeatedly characterized Donna Lucia as having been "taken," "stolen," and "wrongfully retained" by the Respondent. At this point, the Presiding Prince interrupted proceedings.

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PRESIDING: You keep using the word 'stolen'.

CLAIMANT: Because she was stolen from me.

PRESIDING: Was she taken by force?

CLAIMANT: No.

PRESIDING: Threatened? Compelled? Bound by spell or Bargain?

CLAIMANT: No, but—

PRESIDING: Then what, precisely, did he steal?

[Simultaneous objections.]

The Presiding Prince listened for some time before again interrupting the proceedings.

PRESIDING: Has anyone considered asking her?

[No response.]

PRESIDING: Bring forward Donna Lucia.

Donna Lucia was escorted to the front.

PRESIDING: Donna Lucia, do you wish to return to your husband?

LUCIA: No, Your Highness.

PRESIDING: Do you wish to remain with Zorzi?

[Extended pause.]

LUCIA: No, Your Highness.

RESPONDENT: Lucia—

PRESIDING: I don't recall asking you.

PRESIDING: Donna Lucia, before this moment, has anyone, from either side, asked what you wanted?

LUCIA: No, Your Highness.

[Pause]

PRESIDING: Clerk.

CLERK: Your Highness?

PRESIDING: Amend the record. Donna Lucia Bellandi Contarini is no longer an Interested Party. She is the Principal Party in Interest.

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By order of the Presiding Prince, Donna Lucia Bellandi Contarini was redesignated from Interested Party to Principal Party in Interest.

During subsequent argument regarding disposition of the Contarini marriage compact, counsel for Claimant challenged Donna Lucia's standing and character, citing her former profession as a cortigiana onesta and multiple violations of Venetian sumptuary law.

Claimant's advocate argues that she has a history of "passing herself off" as a respectable noblewoman by dressing herself above her legally permitted station, and cited multiple violations of Venetian sumptuary law, pointing as evidence to the pearls currently adorning Donna Lucia.

Note: Donna Lucia is dressed in a silk gown with pearl jewelry.

PRESIDING: Those pearls. Are they yours?

LUCIA: Yes, Your Highness.

PRESIDING: How did you acquire them?

LUCIA: Through a Bargain, Your Highness.

PRESIDING: What are the details of the Bargain?

LUCIA: Before my marriage to the Claimant, I entered a Bargain with a wealthy patron, that for thirty nights, I would treat him not as a Patron, but as a man: dine with him, talk with him, listen to him, accompany him to festivities, and otherwise grant him my complete attention. In exchange, I received this pearl set.

PRESIDING: Can you recite the precise wording?

LUCIA: For thirty nights, you shall give me your company freely and without pretense. You shall speak to me truthfully, laugh only when amused, praise only what you admire, and offer no affection you do not feel. At the conclusion of the thirtieth night, the pearls shall be yours absolutely, without condition, debt, or continuing obligation.

PRESIDING: The Bargain was fulfilled?

LUCIA: In full.

PRESIDING: Were any conditions placed upon your ownership after fulfillment?

LUCIA: None.

Court recessed while the Presiding Prince requested the contract record from Infernal Affairs. Proceedings resumed upon its receipt and review.

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PRESIDING: According to the Contract, the pearls were rightfully earned, and ownership in full was transferred to Donna Lucia. Counsel, you are stating that Donna Lucia may not wear an item legally owned?

COUNSEL FOR CLAIMANT: Owing to her former profession, Your Highness.

PRESIDING: I see.

[Pause.]

PRESIDING: No, actually. I don't.

Counsel explains the law.

PRESIDING: So she owns the pearls.

COUNSEL: Yes.

PRESIDING: But cannot wear them.

COUNSEL: Correct. Venetian law does not prohibit her ownership, Your Highness. Only her display of them.

PRESIDING: Because she was once a courtesan.

COUNSEL: Precisely. The restriction protects public morality and clearly distinguishes respectable women from courtesans.

PRESIDING: The pearls apparently underwent a remarkable moral transformation when Senator Contarini married her. This law is idiotic. What value is ownership if another may dictate whether the owner can use what belongs to her?

COUNSEL: With respect, Your Highness, your duty is to apply the law, not question its wisdom.

[Extended pause.]

PRESIDING: I am a Prince of Hell. Questioning authority is rather foundational to the position.

Court recessed while the Presiding Prince deliberated.

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RULING:

A mortal authority may not impose restrictions upon the possession, use, or display of property transferred pursuant to a valid Infernal Bargain where such restrictions contradict the express terms of that Bargain. The Court therefore finds unenforceable any restriction imposed upon Donna Lucia's use or display of the aforementioned pearls solely on the basis of her sex, marital status, or former profession.

RULING:

The Court finds that neither the Claimant nor the Respondent possess an enforceable claim to Donna Lucia's person, affection, companionship, or desire. Complaint dismissed.

[Simultaneous objections.]

Both Claimant and Respondent objected to the Court's determination that neither possessed an enforceable claim to Donna Lucia. The objections were overruled.

[Respondent used language subsequently struck from the official record.]

CLAIMANT: She is my wife. She will return to Ca' Contarini Bellombra when this farce is concluded. I would wager the palazzo itself upon it.

RESPONDENT: And I would wager my countinghouse, warehouses, and quay at Rialto that she will leave here with me.

PRESIDING: Did you just make a Wager? In my courtroom?

[Pause. Presiding Prince requested confirmation from the Clerk.]

PRESIDING: Did you record those Wagers?

CLERK: I—no, Your Highness.

PRESIDING: Please do.

[Record updated]

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PRESIDING: Donna Lucia, you have heard my ruling and dismissal of this claim. You are free to choose your path. To settle the Wager made within this Court, please publicly declare which, if either, of these two men you choose.

LUCIA: Neither, Your Highness. I prefer to remain single.

PRESIDING: Do you wish to retain your married name?

LUCIA: No, Your Highness. I would prefer to return to Lucia Bellandi. Neither man deserves another moment of my time or attention.

RULING:

The Court finds that both Claimant and Respondent freely entered Wagers upon Donna Lucia Bellandi's choice, and that neither satisfied the stated condition of his Wager. Both Wagers are therefore lost and the pledged stakes forfeit. As the subject of said Wagers was Donna Lucia's affection and future disposition, the Court awards both forfeited stakes to Donna Lucia Bellandi as remuneration for having been made the object of this proceeding.

[Proceedings interrupted for approximately one-quarter hour.]

Proceedings concluded without further incident.

Archivist's Note: Surviving accounts disagree as to whether the interruption constituted a riot.