

Infernal Archives

IA-PA-291044

Recorded by: His Infernal Highness Leviathan, Prince of Envy

Related Record: IA-JR-291044

Subject: Unauthorized Judicial Activity of His Infernal Highness Asmodeus, Prince of Lust

Territory: Venice, Most Serene Republic of San Marco

Let the record first reflect that I was absent from Venice when the matter of Contarini v. Lorzzi was brought before the Infernal Court. Had I been present, none of what followed would have occurred.

I returned three days after judgment was entered.

There was a riot in Piazza San Marco. Not an alleged riot. Not, as the Archivist responsible for IA-JR-291044 so delicately recorded, an "interruption" concerning which surviving accounts disagree.

It was a riot.

A courtesan was standing atop a fountain wearing enough pearls to ransom a minor prince. Two more were parading through the Piazza in cloth-of-gold previously prohibited to women of their profession. A group of patrician matrons had gathered outside a magistrate's residence demanding to know why women they described in considerably less polite terms were permitted to dress as their social equals.

The silk merchants appeared delighted. The pearl merchants were ecstatic.

The Venetian authorities were neither.

I had been back in my territory for less than an hour when I learned the cause: Asmodeus had been allowed to act as a judge.

I pause here so that whoever reviews this record in the future may fully appreciate the magnitude of that sentence.

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My brother. Asmodeus. Had been entrusted with judicial authority.

I immediately requested the record of proceedings.

To my considerable annoyance, I discovered that his principal ruling was correct.

Donna Lucia Bellandi was not property. Neither her husband nor her lover possessed any enforceable Infernal claim to her person, affection, companionship, or desire. The Contarini compact contained no provision compelling her continued residence, fidelity of affection, or surrender of personal autonomy. Dismissal was appropriate.

His ruling concerning the pearls was also, regrettably, correct.

The property had been transferred to Donna Lucia through a valid Infernal Bargain whose terms granted ownership absolutely and without continuing condition. Venetian law could no more diminish that grant after fulfillment than it could rewrite the Bargain itself.

I would like the record to reflect that I deeply resent having been required to write the preceding paragraph.

Unfortunately, Asmodeus did not stop after rendering two defensible judgments.

He rarely does.

While I was reviewing the record, I received notice that Ca' Contarini Bellombra had changed hands. This was concerning.

I subsequently learned that the Lorzzi countinghouse, warehouses, and quay at Rialto had also changed hands. This was considerably more concerning.

Both properties had been awarded to Donna Lucia Bellandi after Senator Contarini and Matteo Lorzzi made wagers, in open court, concerning which man she would choose.

She chose neither.

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Asmodeus declared both wagers lost.

I have reviewed the applicable Infernal law governing wagers.

Again, regrettably, his ruling is defensible.

I hate my brother.

The matter might nevertheless have remained manageable had Donna Lucia simply retained the properties.

She did not.

She sold Ca' Contarini Bellombra. To a Genoese merchant.

I learned this when I looked across the Grand Canal and saw the banner of a Genoese mercantile house hanging from a Contarini balcony.

I then turned my attention to the Lorzzi mercantile holdings at Rialto. I had hoped, briefly, that this portion of my brother's judgment might prove easier to unwind.

It did not.

Donna Lucia retained the countinghouse, warehouses, and quay awarded to her by the Court. Within days she dismissed two of Lorzzi's factors, renegotiated an unfavorable shipping agreement, recovered several outstanding debts his clerks had apparently considered uncollectable, and secured a new contract for goods arriving from the Levant.

The business was already more profitable under her management than it had been under Lorzzi's.

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I met with her personally. She was wearing the pearls. I chose not to comment. Donna Lucia informed me, politely but quite firmly, that she had no intention of surrendering the properties, remarrying, reconciling with either man, or leaving Venice. She further informed me that if I intended to overturn my brother's judgment, she would exercise her right under Infernal law to appeal directly to the Imperial Court.

I asked whether Asmodeus had told her she could do that. She smiled. He had. Of course he had.

I reviewed the accounts a second time. They were impeccable.

I allowed the judgment to stand.

For the avoidance of doubt, Donna Lucia Bellandi remains in lawful possession of the former Lorzzi mercantile holdings at Rialto. (Subsequent records indicate that the enterprise continued to prosper under her direction.)

This is the only satisfactory result arising from the entire affair.

There are moments in an immortal existence that remain perfectly preserved in memory.

That is one of mine.

I found Asmodeus shortly thereafter.

He was drinking wine. Of course he was drinking wine.

He was seated on a terrace overlooking the Grand Canal with every appearance of a man entirely satisfied with his day's work.

Following is a record of our conversation.

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E: "Take down the Genoese banner. "

He looked toward the palazzo. "Why?"

E: "Because it is flying from Ca ' Contarini. "

A: "Not anymore. "

I counted to ten. This did not help.

E: "You awarded one of the great houses of Venice to a courtesan. "

A: "Former courtesan. "

E: "That distinction is not relevant. "

A: "It seems rather relevant to her. "

E: "Who then sold it to a Genoese merchant. "

A: "She negotiated an excellent price. "

E: "That is not the point. "

A: "I thought you would appreciate her business sense. "

I informed him that I did not.

I then explained, slowly and with considerably more patience than he deserved, that in the course of a single judicial proceeding he had destabilized two patrician houses, created a conflict between Venetian law and Infernal property rights, encouraged every courtesan in Venice possessing goods acquired through a Bargain to challenge the sumptuary laws, transferred commercially significant property at Rialto to a newly independent woman, and permitted a Genoese mercantile family to acquire a palazzo on the Grand Canal.

He drank his wine while I spoke.

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When I finished, he considered the matter.

Then he smiled. "You seem envious. "

I ordered him out of Venice.

For clarity, this order remains in force.

Permanently.