

The Mystery of Palazzo Donna Anna



There is an ancient and mysterious legend around Palazzo Donna Anna, an impressive and magnificent building in the heart of Posillipo, in Naples, built in 1642 on a pre-existing one by the architect Cosimo Fanzago.

“At night the building becomes black, intensely black; the heaven clears on his head, high and beautiful stars shine, the sea of Posillipo is luminous, from villas lost in the woods songs of love and melancholy notes of the mandolin can be heard: the building remains dark and sea waves roar under its vaults. Sometimes it seems that a weak light passes slowly through its stairs and fantastic shadows are drawn on the windows [...].

Perhaps they are ghosts and we smile are those the ghosts of lovers? O divine, divine ghosts! Why can not we, like you, yearn for love, even after death? ”

from Leggende Napoletane by Matilde Serao



It is said that at the time of the dynasty of Anjou, in the district of Saint Lucia, lived Beppe, a fisherman, greatly appreciated for his extreme passion and his love affairs.

Queen Giovanna II, eager to "experience" the qualities of the famous fisherman, ordered the construction of a beautiful villa in the area surrounding Posillipo hill, in a secluded place, far from prying eyes.

She called it "Villa delle Sirene" (Mermaids' Villa) where she spent three days and three nights of intense passion with Beppe. Inside the villa, there were trapdoors to prevent the lovers she used to meet to flee from it. Unfortunately, those entering the villa were inevitably the victims of a terrible fate and Beppe, of course, was the first victim, because the Queen could not allow him, once he left the house, to tell about what had happened, prejudicing her reputation. So, when Beppe was leaving the house, the floor opened beneath his feet and the man sank into the sea.

When Stella, Beppe's girlfriend, heard the news, she began to torment herself for his death and cursed the queen with all her strength to the point that her curses came true. Even after the queen's death, the curse did not cease: it continued to incessantly hit all the villa's aristocratic owners.

When the villa was inherited by a rich, haughty and deceitful woman, Anna Carafa, the wife of an important Neapolitan aristocratic, Don Ramiro Guzman, Duke of Medina Las Torres, the villa was destroyed and a more magnificent house was built in order to cope with the curse. The new building was called "Palazzo Donna Anna", named after its new owner.

From the depths of the sea, Beppe and Stella sought revenge because they couldn't accept the idea that powerful people could take advantage of poor people, regardless of their feelings and imposing their power, treating them as puppets.

Donna Anna Carafa loved organizing amazing parties where the Spanish and Neapolitan nobility participated. During one of those parties, the palace shone brightly more than ever, it was all a bustle of servants and butlers, while the rich, powerful and feared Donna Anna, in her precious red and silver dress, disdainful and proud, welcomed her guests.

That night, in the main hall of the palace, a theatre had been set up for a performance, whose actors, according to French fashion in vogue at the time, were all nobles. Among them there was also the beautiful, young woman Mercedes de Las Torres, the duchess's nephew, who played the part of her master's love slave played by Gaetano di Casapesenna, Donna Anna's lover.

The two performed with such a passion that, in the final scene of the kiss, everyone applauded enthusiastically, except Donna Anna who turned pale and worn out with jealousy after seeing her lover kissing the young Mercedes passionately. The following days, the two women argued violently and, suddenly, Donna Mercedes disappeared mysteriously.

Rumours spread that she had hidden in a convent after a sudden religious vocation, but the poor Gaetano desperately sought her incessantly in Italy, France, Spain and Hungary, begged, pleaded and cried all the tears he could, until he died in a battle. Jealousy had been poisoning Donna Anna's soul and the hatred never abandoned her until the end of her days.

From time to time, the ghost of the cruel Donna Anna appears in the palace together with the presence of the two sad lovers, Mercedes and Gaetano, who have been desperately looking for each other since ever.

Some people swear to have seen ghosts appear from those dark windows, emitting painful laments.



To all the people who love the beauty of Imagination, Nature, Love and Arts

*Translated by Maria Laura Nerino IVEu
Liceo Statale A. Galizia
Nocera Inferiore - ITALY*

I hope this short story caught your interest, so when you have the chance to go and see Donna Anna Palace in Posillipo, your fancy will brighten its windows and will revive its protagonists.