

The Artful Lodger

Hand driven brass rings, holding the heavy green velvet-drapery, rattled soft when Anna dragged the curtain aside. Tiny dust elves started to dance in the sunlight. Anna opened the glass doors to her balcony and let some fresh air in. A gondolier was singing his eternal song of a love long lost. Anna sighed and looked back at her nicely laid table. Crystal glasses and an elegant carafe were neatly arranged on cool white linen that covered a classical pinewood table.

This afternoon she awaited Michele di Pellegrino whom she invited to try her wine. Her produce of last year's September from her property in Albanella-Campania. The wine became ripe in the old oaken barrel she bought as teenager more than 40 years ago. Here in Venice this wine was a rarity with its unique chestnut sweet taste that reminded of heavy soil, porcini and fruity grapes .

Her thoughts about wine were suddenly interrupted. She heard a sharp cry. A disturbing tumult was going on outside. She heard guys arguing and running. Anna traipsed to her balcony. A handful of stout men gesticulated wildly while discussing loudly. Anna listened to their fast talking but she only understood a few words of the broad Venetian dialect.

She hurried back to snatch her opera glass from the mantelpiece. Maybe she could find out what was going on if she only saw the scene better. By returning to the balcony Anna already understood. The men were chasing something which had managed to escape from 'Ristorante Beppo'. It took her a few seconds, but then Anna found out about the reason for the tumult.

There he stood: A gorgeous and proud domestic cock. A Gallus Domesticus in silky white feathers each tip jet black tinted. He was the king of fowl ruling in his royal colors. His crown was cherry red.

The renitent rooster focused on his enemies with a piercing stare from his mesmerizing eyes. Close to death he obviously felt the flame of life burning down his fears to ashes; he stood firm on the red brick pavement ready to defend his life not knowing that one of his chasers already was sneaking up on him from behind. On the cock's left: the canal - to his right Anna's tall doge palace. The hunters in front of him turned their words into action. No further discussion was needed. Cocks cannot swim and so it would be easy to catch him once he was trapped. Anna felt sorry for the tough bird.

'Why don't you just leave the bird alone? Go home. Today it's spaghetti and tomatoes on the menu!' was all she managed to utter. Her compassionate anxiety petrified her body and her brains.

When the bird heard Anna shouting from her balcony he tilted his head slightly to find the source of this voice. The men ignored Anna and were now close enough to jump towards the cock. Anna's hand was glued to her opera glass. She studied the cock intensely. She realized that he knew about the hopelessness of his situation. He seemed to be desperate, but suddenly Anna saw a tiny star of light in his eyes. A beam of hope to overcome his predators urged by a strong will to

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survive. He shuddered and spread his short wings, jumped up - down and up again and to Anna's delightful surprise he started flying.

His flight was not as elegant as it could have been if he was a seagull but he managed to ascend several meters - high enough to escape. Clumsily and struggling hard to keep it up he fluttered close to the wall and finally made it to the richly ornamented balustrade of Anna's balcony.

There he landed on a sturdy branch of artfully wrought iron ivy, clutching it tight. The cock peered down to the group of his chasers. They were staring back - crestfallen. A flying cock was something they never had seen before. Meanwhile the bird stretched his now safe neck and emitted a loud crowing of triumph. Done so, he hopped down to the balcony's marble floor and marched straight - without any further ado - into Anna's living room.

Michele di Pellegrino never came to try Anna's aromatic wine. Later she poured some of it into one of the Bohemian crystal glasses and placed herself on her divan. She leaned back, relaxed and drank the blood red liquid. It tasted like coming home. She decided to keep the beautiful Venetian *Gallus Domesticus* and named him Alberto d' Albanella.