

## 26. GHOST STORIES: DONN'ANNA CARAFA

Palazzo Donn'Anna was built in XVI century. It is a large building which stands on the sea in Posillipo. One of its first owners was **Dragonetto Bonifacio**, then the **Ravaschieri** took it over, and then in 1571 **Luigi Carafa di Stigliano** bought it. One of the descendants of the Carafa family, Antonio, married **Elena Aldobrandini**, one of Clemente VIII's granddaughters, and they had three children: Giuseppe, Onofrio and **Anna**. Born in November, 1607, Anna lost both her father and her brothers within a very short space of time and had only her mother and grandparents left.

In 1636 Donn'Anna Carafa married the Spanish viceroy **Filippo Ramiro Guzman**, Duke of Medina and she inherited the house. In 1642, the couple decided to have their house renovated. They employed **Cosimo Fanzago** to do the work. Work had been under way for more than two years when the viceroy had to leave. At that point, work on the building stopped, and never resumed. **Matilde Serao** in her *Neapolitan Legends* describes the building as dark and oppressive: *sotto le sue volte s'ode solo il fragore del mare...Le sue finestre alte, larghe, senza vetri, rassomigliano ad occhi senz'anima* (The only thing you can smell under its vaults is the sea. Its high, wide, glassless windows look like soulless eyes).

Years before, those same windows had reflected the dazzling lights of a party. Boats were moored around the building, hung with streamers and coloured lanterns. All the Spanish and Neapolitan nobility were gathered together for one of **Anna Carafa's wonderful parties**. She was a **beautiful woman** who was greatly admired by the rich and famous but her superior air and her vanity had made her a few enemies. That evening, the group of hand-picked guests were to watch a play and a Moorish dance display before the music would start and they would dance until dawn. What is strange is that, following the French custom popular at the time, **the actors in the play were themselves members of the nobility**. On this occasion there was **donna Mercede de las Torres**, Anna's Spanish niece. Donna Mercede was young and beautiful with long dark hair and eyes to match. She played the part of a young slave who fell in love with her master and remained so devoted to him that she sacrificed her own life in order to save his. The young girl, Mercede, was very convincing in her role, as was **Gaetano di Casapesenna** who played the master. When, in the final scene, Gaetano had to kiss his beloved slave one last time, he did it with such passion that the audience couldn't help but applaud. With the exception of donn'Anna, who went deathly pale and starting biting her lip. She was jealous because Gaetano di Casapesenna had, in fact, been **her lover**.

Over the next few days donn'Anna's jealousy and donna Mercede's youthful anger led to some violent altercations between the two women. One day Mercede **disappeared**. Rumour had it that she had had a sudden religious calling and had locked herself away in a convent.

Gaetano di Casapesenna looked for her all over, in Italy, France, Spain and Hungary but without success. He prayed and pleaded and wept but he never saw her again before he died in battle at a young age. The palace on the sea hosted other parties and other celebrations in honour of the famous duchess but her soul had been tainted and she sat on her throne, cold and alone.

On 7 May 1644 Guzman was nominated viceroy of Castiglia and he returned to Spain while donn'Anna retired to Portici where she died on 24 October 1645 a very sick and lonely woman.

Legend has it that the ghost of donn'Anna still appears every so often to haunt the Palace in Posillipo. Others say that the ghostly presences are the restless souls of Gaetano di Casapesenna and donna Mercede de las Torres. Still others believe that it is the ghost of **Queen Giovanna I of Anjou**.

Whatever the truth may be, even today, after extensive renovation work has largely restored Palazzo donn'Anna to its former glory, it still retains an air of charm and mystery.