

Patricia M. Muhammad  
presents

# Ardor's Prestige

## Interesting Facts

Ardor's Prestige is an 18<sup>th</sup> century historical romance novel set in Venice (Venezia), Italy. The novel centers around two main characters, Duchessa Anastasia and Duca Leandro. They encounter one another incidentally as both stole away from their respective manors in the depth of the silent night.

1. Ardor's Prestige is the author's first historical romance novel set in an Italia city-state. The author has always wished to visit Italy.
2. Venice, similar to other main cities of what is now known as Italy, was a city-state during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It had its own autonomous hierarchy.

Upon their initial encounter, Anastasia and Leandro do not disclose their full identities. The courtiers only share a portion of their names, though they both exchange 'gifts' to remind each of this fateful night.

3. It is most unusual for a gentleman and maiden to exchange gifts, especially at the onset of their unintended meeting. The author used their gestures as a means to foreshadow that this would not be the last time that Anastasia and Leandro were to meet. Their reverence of the fits they exchange was the meaning both thought it had for their future—and they were right.

When Anastasia returns, both Sienna, the senior maidservant, and Giorgio, her *cavalier servente*, witness her discretion. Sienna admonishes her, though promises not to disclose her rebellious act. Her cavalier servente, Giorgio, does as he always had done before, he watches over her and serves her. Giorgio has a budding affection for his charge. Lady Anastasia continuously and truthfully reminds him that he shall never have her; the duchessa had always been meant for someone else.

4. Traditionally, a cavalier servente not only serves as domestic or guard for his charge, but he is provided to a woman for company, comfort and possibly other matters. The author wrote Giorgio as purely a male servant and sort of guard whom the d'Alessi family assigns Duchessa Anastasia as his charge. Though he understands his duty to her, his heart is continuously rebuffed for not accepting what destiny has determined. He shall never be more than her servant until she is wed to whom is ordained for her. Duchessa Anastasia and Duca Leandro are to be married.

On another occasion, Duchessa Anastasia leaves the d'Alessi manor to the main town square. There are plentiful watersways, beautiful architecture, and artistry to be explored. Duchessa Anastasia falls into the nearby estuary. The gondolier does not see her plight. She is drowning. Yet other eyes are watching. One set belongs to Giorgio. He rescues her. She is embarrassed. He covers her with a blanket he finds. Though Giorgio knows that he can never court nor marry Anastasia, the servant is loyal. Nevertheless, the duchessa is careful. Giorgio's incessant reminder of his interest in her annoys her, however the duchessa is cordial. She continues to remind Giorgio that she will never be his. Anastasia focuses on what she believes to be true. She will indeed see Leandro again.

5. Venice was a bustling city of maritime trade, not only for the Apennine Peninsula, but also as a source of goods to other European nations. Local Venetians used these thin estuaries as a typical means of transport throughout the city. The author wrote the scene wherein Duchessa Anastasia falls into the waterway to demonstrate her sheltered life. What was typical as public transport for many was an unusual visual attraction, causing for the maiden to take a misstep and fall.

Duca Leandro becomes Duchessa Anastasia's suitor. During their courtship, they become better acquainted with one another. They reveal more of their identities, yet the maiden is still not yet fully familiar with exactly who this courtier is. It is of no matter for now; they have grown in immense affection for one another. There is nothing that can intervene with what the hand of Providence has ordained for them. On one outing, the duchessa displays a quirky moment when she speaks with her beau concerning the clinging vine outside a manor. Leandro is astonished by her whimsical disclosure though he appreciates yet another aspect of her personality that she has revealed.

6. In several historical romance novels, the characters are well-bred with articulate speech, are able to play an instrument and quite knowledgeable of the artistic culture that defines their country as well as that of others. Authors have used these characteristics of setting in order to transport the reader into a particular century. Yet the author is aware that regardless of the era in which man and woman may find themselves in, problems, varying personalities and even small moments of triumph transcend this boundary. The author described Duchessa Anastasia with the typical traits of that era, but in this intimate moment that she has shared with Duca Leandro, she is open, bemused, and amenable to his response though she may not know what it will be. The duca attempts to further the moment in which Anastasia will still find comfort in her fiancé's presence. This tenderness is what some may actually deem atypical of 18<sup>th</sup> century courtships due to the nature of their formality. Nevertheless, the author asserts that the intimate presence between Leandro and Anastasia justifies the duchessa's moment of whimsy.

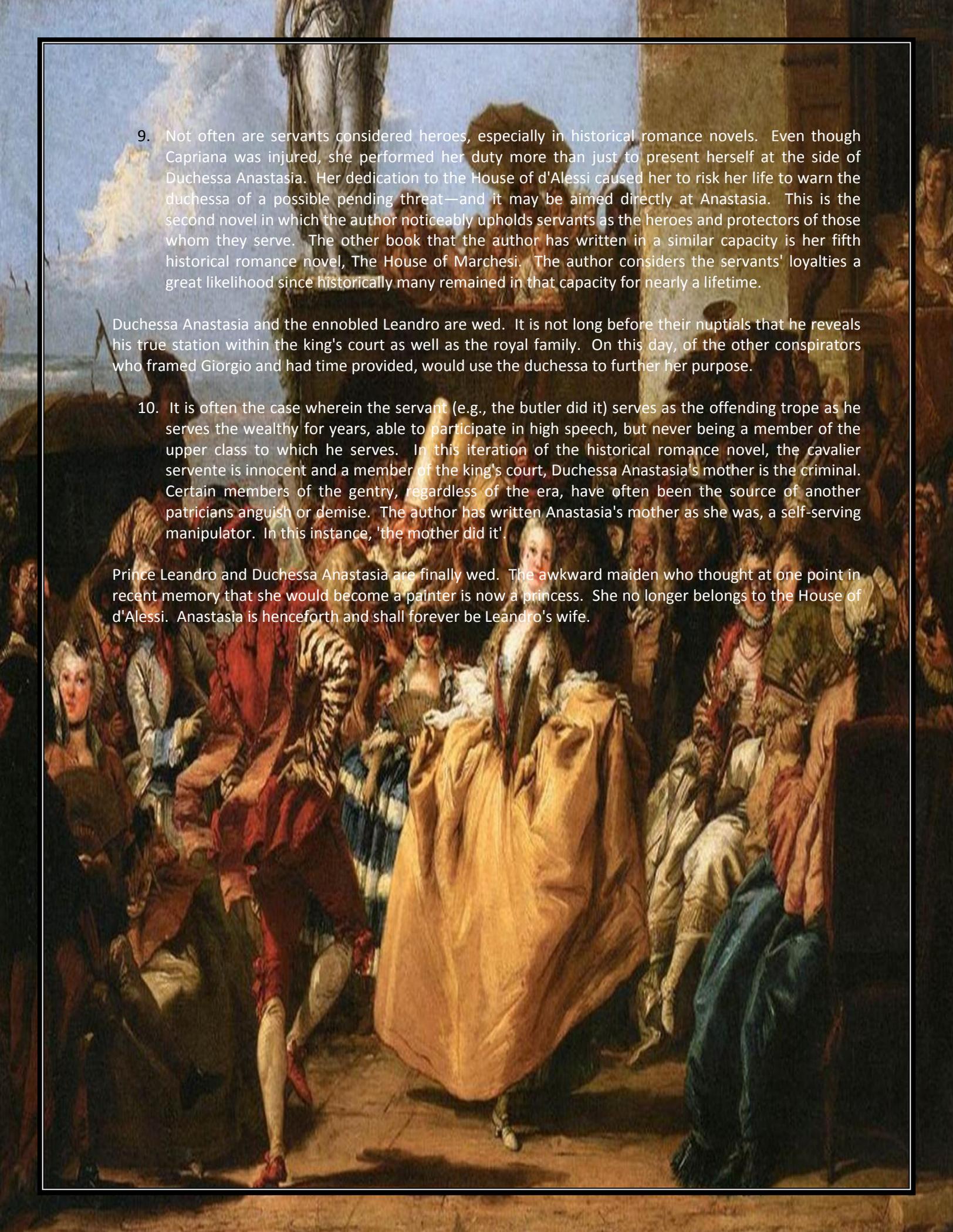
Before Giorgio is eventually cleared of the allegations that the Crown has levied against him, he is interrogated by the Council of Ten. This is where more of Giorgio's unfortunate background is revealed.

7. The author performed research to determine whether there was a sort of law enforcement agency during 18<sup>th</sup> century Venice. The Council of Ten was an actual investigative entity that existed during this time. It had its own rules, yet it remained under the authority of the Venetian king and indeed investigated matters such as treason. Though violence may not have been characteristic of the Council, the intense nature of their tactics likely did occur.

Duchessa Anastasia is accompanied to the Carnevale masquerade ball by her younger servant, Capriana. The duchessa is also escorted by her fiancé, Duca Leandro.

8. The Carnevale of Venezia celebration had its roots in religious holiday. Over the years the celebrations extended, indulgence both in food and intimate relations became widespread. The celebrations would last throughout the night and the wearers of masks could not conceal much of the decadence they had partook of.

While at the ball, Capriana discovers one of the persons responsible for framing Giorgio. Before she is able to disclose, she falls and is injured. As she convalesces in the private quarters of the hosting mansion, she is about to be murdered. Giorgio, who was not supposed to be present at the gathering, saves the sedated Capriana, just as he was there to save Duchessa Anastasia in the waterway.

- 
9. Not often are servants considered heroes, especially in historical romance novels. Even though Capriana was injured, she performed her duty more than just to present herself at the side of Duchessa Anastasia. Her dedication to the House of d'Alessi caused her to risk her life to warn the duchessa of a possible pending threat—and it may be aimed directly at Anastasia. This is the second novel in which the author noticeably upholds servants as the heroes and protectors of those whom they serve. The other book that the author has written in a similar capacity is her fifth historical romance novel, *The House of Marchesi*. The author considers the servants' loyalties a great likelihood since historically many remained in that capacity for nearly a lifetime.

Duchessa Anastasia and the ennobled Leandro are wed. It is not long before their nuptials that he reveals his true station within the king's court as well as the royal family. On this day, of the other conspirators who framed Giorgio and had time provided, would use the duchessa to further her purpose.

10. It is often the case wherein the servant (e.g., the butler did it) serves as the offending trope as he serves the wealthy for years, able to participate in high speech, but never being a member of the upper class to which he serves. In this iteration of the historical romance novel, the cavalier servente is innocent and a member of the king's court, Duchessa Anastasia's mother is the criminal. Certain members of the gentry, regardless of the era, have often been the source of another patricians anguish or demise. The author has written Anastasia's mother as she was, a self-serving manipulator. In this instance, 'the mother did it'.

Prince Leandro and Duchessa Anastasia are finally wed. The awkward maiden who thought at one point in recent memory that she would become a painter is now a princess. She no longer belongs to the House of d'Alessi. Anastasia is henceforth and shall forever be Leandro's wife.