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photograph by Antonio Scannavina



An Italian Love Story

ANNARITA AND GIAN LUCA LEFT ITALY. THEN THEY
FOUND IT IN EACH OTHER, IN NEW YORK.

GROWING UP IN ITALY, Gian Luca Giovanetti always thought he'd end up meeting a nice Italian girl he could settle down with. And he did. Once he moved to New York City.

Gian Luca met Annarita Sasso the way so many people do—at work—and once they connected, their relationship was fast, furious and exciting.

Annarita, who grew up in Rome, came to Manhattan in 2001 after taking a marketing position with RAI, the Italian broadcasting company. She soon tired of the long hours, however, and decided to go back to school to study film. To tide her over, she took a hostessing job at Gnocco, a rustic Italian restaurant in Manhattan's East Village. She knew the place well; she had often eaten there. But she had no idea that her whole life was about to change.

Gnocco's owner happened to be one Gian Luca Giovanetti, a forty-year-old charmer from the northern town of Modena (home of Ferrari).

"We met at a special time in our lives," says Annarita, thirty-one, in her lilting, accented English. "I was getting tired of having never-ending relationships with no commitment. At forty, Gian Luca also wanted to start a family. We were lucky to meet then."

Not that they instantly fell in love. It took months for them to have a conversation,

and when they did talk they were very formal. "He was my boss," she says.

"I was concentrating on my business," Gian Luca explains. "But I noticed her for sure."

At night, he would sit at the bar and eat his dinner while she took reservations. They wouldn't talk. Finally, one night he offered her some food, and, impulsively, she picked up a fork and jabbed him in the arm.

"I just wanted to be funny because we were both so formal," she says, adding that she was so embarrassed that she turned around and hightailed it out of the bar.

He found it amusing. "I took it as a good sign," he says with a laugh.

After that, they were decidedly more relaxed with each other, although nothing romantic happened until three weeks after the Great Fork Incident, when he asked her to help choose plants for the restaurant. She said sure, and despite the fact that she was wearing gold heels and a sexy red dress, she hopped on a bicycle, and they sped off together.

That night they went out for their first drink and discovered that they had much in common: They're both free-spirited, stubborn and passionate about life. They love modern dance, good wine, music and dancing. They are both Geminis.

They also had a deep emotional connection. "I fell in love with Gian Luca because of his good heart and protective ways," Annarita says. "Maybe in that way I'm an old-fashioned Italian woman. I like strong men, and it was the first time I had dated one. On the other hand, he was looking for a strong woman."

Gian Luca agrees. "I had never thought about marriage before, but after knowing Annarita for just four or five months, I thought about spending my whole life with her."

He proposed not long after they met, but like all good Italian men, he asked Annarita's father for her hand. (Happily, he said "Sì.")

They were married on October 15, 2005, in Poggio d'Acona, a small village in the countryside of Arezzo, Tuscany, before eighty friends and relatives. They arrived the night before with their closest friends and, in keeping with tradition, didn't see one another until the ceremony the following day. At an early wedding mass, Annarita carried a beautiful bouquet of roses, which is considered good luck, as a rose must be perfect in order to bloom. The couple and their guests then spent the afternoon feasting on gnocchi with truffles and sliced beef at La Gravina, an old mansion where her brother was married the previous year (and Annarita had caught the bouquet!).

At the reception, Gian Luca gave each guest a small mesh sachet with five sugar-coated almonds, called *confetti*. This traditional gift represents the bittersweet aspect of marriage, and the five

almonds symbolize health, wealth, fertility, longevity and happiness.

"If you live in your home country, you think differently—you like to rebel," says Gian Luca of their wedding. "When you live abroad, you realize that traditions are important. Maybe that's why we decided to marry in Italy. We were nostalgic for the past." After the wedding, the couple returned to New York and to Gnocco, where Italy and romance are always in the air. ✧

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