



The Golden Egg

Donna Leon

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The Golden Egg (The Commissario Guido Brunetti Mystery Series Book 22)

276 pp. "In The Golden Egg, as the first leaves of autumn begin to fall, Vice Questore Patta asks Brunetti to look into a minor shop-keeping violation committed by the mayor's future daughter-in-law. Brunetti has no interest in helping his boss amass political favors, but he has little choice but to comply. Then Brunetti's wife, Paola, comes to him with a request of her own. The mentally handicapped man who worked at their dry cleaner has just died of a sleeping pill overdose, and Paola loathes the idea that he lived and died without anyone noticing him, or helping him. Brunetti begins to investigate the death and is surprised when he finds nothing on the man: no birth certificate, no passport, no driver's license, no credit cards. As far as the Italian government is concerned, he never existed. Stranger still, the dead man's mother refuses to speak to the police, and assures Brunetti that her son's identification papers were stolen in a burglary. As secrets unravel, Brunetti suspects that the Lembos, an aristocratic family, might be somehow connected to the death. But why would anyone want this sweet, simple-minded man dead?" Keywords: DONNA LEON GOLDEN EGG COMMISSARIO GUIDO BRUNETTI MYSTERY FICTION

The Golden Egg Details

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From Reader Review The Golden Egg for online ebook

Joyce says

This may be Leon's darkest crime novel yet. They're all pretty bleak, as corruption in the government at least, is rife. But this is disturbing on a more personal level for Brunetti and for readers--the crime involves human cruelty that is more chilling than one that involves graphically described violence. I've read all in the series, and while I'm not certain this is the best, it has certainly stayed with me. Brunetti battles corruption in the police department and beyond in modern Italy, solving intriguing cases, and taking us with him throughout Venice. Wonderful sense of time and place, people and customs. I love the glimpses of his family and family life, and that's especially prevalent here, set up in contrast to the murder victim's family. There's not as much humor as in others, but there's a lot of heart. In his starred review in Booklist, Bill Ott called it a "celebration of the humanizing power of words." It is that, and in smart dialog, polished and intelligent prose Leon helps those of us who love language see what life would be without it.

Tony says

THE GOLDEN EGG. (2013). Donna Leon. ***1/2.

Here is the latest Commissario Guido Brunetti mystery from this author. What makes these books fascinating is Leon's encyclopedic knowledge of the city of Venice. Although American born, she has lived in Venice for thirty years. She has taken advantage of all of this time to learn the city, but also the dialect of the people. In this episode, Brunetti and his wife learn of the death of a young man that they used to see doing small tasks at their local cleaners. Paola, his wife, begins to talk of the young man, whom she assumed was deaf and dumb. They didn't even know his name. Their ignorance spurred them on to see if they could learn more about him. When Brunetti began to probe into the life of the young man, he found absolutely no record that he even existed: no birth certificate, no driver's license, no record of any arrests, nothing. In a city like Venice, this was impossible, and this lack of substantiation drove Brunetti to even greater lengths to learn more. When a crack began to appear in the life of this young man, it was discovered that a great secret was involved between his mother and a very wealthy family in the city; a secret that went back to the time of his birth.

Lyn Elliott says

It's a while since I read a Donna Leon and I enjoyed her storytelling more than the last couple which left me with really horrible images. The fate of the young man at the centre of the mystery is awful, and the endless corruption familiar, part of the back drop of what I've come to expect of any crime novel set in Italy. It was a relief not to have people trafficking, sadistic sex and making snuff movies with this one.

Some of the scenes are overly melodramatic and some bits don't hang together very well but it's a good quick read.

Really a 3.5

Sam Sattler says

"The Golden Egg" serves as an introduction to me of the "Commissario Guido Brunetti Mysteries" and that means that I'm coming to the series very late and have no way to compare this 2013 novel to those that preceded it. That said, I will say that Brunetti is one of the more laid-back and likable police detectives that I have run into in recent memory. Of course, his leisurely pace is largely due to the fact that he is headquartered in his native Venice, Italy, a city (and a country) that moves at a pace all its own.

Donna Leon's story is akin to the true "mysteries" that I used to read so much of in years past, and is nothing like the more violent detective fiction that I've been reading more recently. In Leon's story, when a deaf "boy" dies suddenly and Brunetti's wife is particularly touched by both his tragic life and by his death, the detective finds himself spending most of his working time trying to unravel the mystery of just whom Davide Castello really was and why he died. But really, there does not appear to be a whole lot of violent crime in Venice at the moment, so Brunetti doesn't feel overly guilty for devoting all of his time (and that of several of his colleagues) to this off-the-books case.

Guido Brunetti is surrounded by interesting characters, not the least of whom are his wife and two children, and this, along with the Venice setting, make me want to look at some of the earlier mysteries in the series - another series to add to my reading list.

Martha Bullen says

Sitting down to read a new Donna Leon mystery novel is like sitting down to eat at my favorite Italian restaurant. I approach each book with anticipation and savor the memories of the Venetian setting and her appealing and very human characters, especially her hero, Commissario Guido Brunetti and his delightful family. I am never disappointed.

Leon is an American who has lived in Venice for thirty years. Her love and knowledge of the city and its inhabitants breathe through every page. I find myself slowing my reading pace way down to slip into the scene and wander the streets of Venice with Brunetti. He has to carry on in doing his job despite corrupt politicians, an impossible boss and some untrustworthy colleagues, but he continues to seek the truth in the cases confronting him. He doesn't always get his man (or woman) but he invariably untangles the reasons behind perplexing crimes. Leon usually slips a social or environmental issue into her plots, but avoids being heavy-handed. Her books make me happy. I encourage you to pick up one of her novels and enter the world of Guido Brunetti.

Pamela says

Like many of the reviewers here, I LOVE Donna Leon's books, and I'm especially fond of Commissario Guido Brunetti. The author is not just a writer of mysteries; I would say her books are literary fiction structured around a mystery with lots to tell us about life. (Louise Penny is another "mystery" author who's writing just gets better and better, deeper and deeper.) Some of Leon's more recent books have been a little too structured around a here's-what's-wrong-with-the-world theme for me: the description in "Beastly Things" of the slaughter of animals to feed those of us who are not vegetarian was a little much.

"The Golden Egg" looks at the subject of language, how we communicate, and the subtle ways we can manipulate other people through its use - or non-use. And of course we see this through Brunetti's eyes; a more thoughtful and caring policeman could not exist anywhere. I'm glad he exists in Venice so I can enjoy that beautiful city and its food vicariously. After a leisurely investigation, the ending will stun you, as it did Brunetti. One of the best in the series.

Gloria Feit says

It is no mean feat to sustain a mystery series at this high a level through 18 novels. Of course, that is just what Donna Leon has accomplished, and more (this is the 19th Commissario Guido Brunetti mystery). Of course, "The Golden Egg" features that charming and erudite Venetian detective in a tale that begins with the death of a mentally challenged deaf mute who works in a tailor shop frequented by Brunetti's wife, Paola. She goads Brunetti into looking into the death, which appears to be natural.

At the same time, Brunetti's boss timidly asks him to look into whether or not the mayor's son's fiancée, part owner of a store, is evading taxes or paying bribes to tax officials. The mayor, of course, is running for reelection and could do without any embarrassing revelations. The Commissario solves this one quickly and smoothly, but spends the entire novel on the other investigation, which becomes more complicated with every interview, no part of which is an official inquiry.

The charm of Brunetti's home life, his relationship with his wife, daughter and son are always plusses in the books that make up this series. Unlike most others, the central theme of this novel is not a serious issue, but a personal, subtle one. Written with the usual depth of knowledge about Venice, its allure and atmosphere, the novel is recommended.

Jo (Mixed Book Bag) says

The Golden Egg is the latest in the Commissario Guido Brunetti Mysteries. If you are a fan of the series you will not be disappointed. If this is your first time to read a Commissario Brunetti mystery you will be a new fan.

The world of Brunetti: The series is set in Venice and each book adds another layer to the world where Brunetti lives. Donna Leon is a long time resident of the city and she brings it to vivid life.

Politics: Like previous books there are many statements about how politics work in Italy. According to the books politicians are not well-loved.

Characters: The characters have been developed over the series. Both the main and side characters are well-developed. There are added dimensions for several characters in each book. I learned more about some of the side characters in The Golden Egg. Look for how Italians from the North and South of Italy feel about each other.

Plot: The plot in The Golden Egg develops as the story progresses. This story has a flow and rhythm where

one action leads to another unexpected piece of information that leads to another and another. It is not until the last chapter that the entire plot is revealed. Even here it is not with a bang. It creeps up and surprises you.

The Commissario Guido Brunetti Mysteries are some of my favorites. While I have read the entire series I did not read it in order. Each book can stand-alone.

Lewerentz says

Mais comment fait-elle ? Donna Leon est vraiment une magicienne ; une des (très) rares auteurs dont j'ai aimé tous les livres, certes à des degrés divers (bien qu'elle soit plus souvent en haut du panier qu'en bas) mais qui ne m'a jamais déçue. Je crois qu'elle pourrait parler de la migration des abeilles au pôle nord, elle réussirait à m'intéresser ?

Bref, un très bon cru !

Robert says

"To learn this little, he had avoided his professional responsibilities for a week, and had engaged or commandeered the help of other officers of the state, all in pursuit of what was becoming to seem like nothing more than a whim." - To those already acquainted with Inspector Brunetti, this will seem typical - he ignores or gets around orders from above because they are either stupid or venial, while pursuing the human interest: in this case the death of an apparent deaf-mute.

The main story, in between meals and reflections, is the search for some official identity for the dead man: "A person can't live somewhere all his life and not leave any traces. It just can't happen", declares the ever-efficient Signora Elettra, but the more Brunetti, abetted by her and his colleagues Graffini, Vianello and Puccini look, the more mysterious it all seems.

At the end, has a wrong been righted? I won't spoil the story, but I think many of you will guess. I have read all of Donna Leon's novels and have loved every one. The biting asides about the corruption and slackness of Italian bureaucracy and the cruelty of a few contrast with the kindness and humanity of so many of the characters and the beauty of the architecture.

Chad Sayban says

Question: How can a crime novel with no crime be interesting? Answer: in this case, it can't - or at least this one doesn't. I had read the first book in this series and it was good. Unfortunately, *The Golden Egg* moves at a sluggish pace and creates virtually no tension or even concern. Commissario Brunetti devotes so much time to wandering around Venice and trying to solve a crime that doesn't exist, that it is difficult to imagine such a leisurely police force existing anywhere on earth. I wanted to stop reading on many occasions and the resolution at the end was simple moralizing with no consequences. This really read more like a Venetian travelogue than a crime novel. With so many better crime series, I won't be heading any deeper into this one.

Blair McDowell says

Let me begin by saying that Donna Leon is incapable of writing a bad book. This book is well worth reading. That being said, it is not up to the standard of her other books featuring Venetian Commissario Guido Brunetti. Both the depiction of the characters and the plot itself are a shadow of Leon's usual writing. Most of the stories in this quite phenomenal series have dealt with important socio-political-religious issues. They have represented a loving, an educated and, at times, despairing, view of Venice and by extension, of Italy. It is this quality that has had me coming back to her writing, book after book.

The Golden Egg is quite simply not up to her usual standard. The story, concerning the life and death of a sad young man who was, or appeared to be, a deaf-mute, simply has no scope. It would have made a good short story perhaps.

Donna Leon's books never have "happy endings". This one ties up things more completely than most, but I can't help feeling that a cliché title predicting an unsurprising cliché ending are indications that perhaps it is time to put Guido Brunetti, Paula, and the rest of the team out to pasture.

Patrice Hoffman says

I am ashamed that it has taken me so long to discover Donna Leon. I can honestly say I am a fan who is going to go out and get more books, preferably the first three, in this Commissario Brunetti series. The Golden Egg is the 22nd novel in the Brunetti series but I feel that it can be read as a standalone as well. Although I'm sure it could have only helped if I had read any of the previous books, I don't feel like anything was lacking in regards to character depth, or vivid imagery. Leon's writing is top-notch and I can't wait to read more by her.

The Golden Egg begins with Commissario Brunetti accepting a request from his boss to investigate a potential scandal for the mayor who is up for re-election involving his future daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law may be in violation of shop-keeper laws. Something completely minor and really has nothing to do with the main dish of the plot. Paola, Brunetti's wife, is saddened by the idea that a mentally handicapped boy has been found dead by eating sleeping pills and may have died alone. Paola only knows of the boy because he "works" at their local cleaners. Brunetti agrees to find out what happened and this is where things get interesting. In an attempt to verify his identity, there is no proof that he's alive. There is no birth certificate, passport, ID, or school records. The boy, which find to later be a man, seems not to exist and his mother isn't giving up any information either. She blames his lack of papers on a recent theft.

I especially liked Brunetti and see why this series has made it to the 22nd book. He seems like a caring man, almost to the point of annoyance. He's not the typical detective that are used in American based procedurals. At times he makes moves based on how it is perceived and is very cautious of his actions not offending someone. I thought this was very interesting because it wasn't common. We often get the wise cracking, forceful brutes as police archetypes. Apparently Venice does not have this problem.

Although Leon's work falls under the thriller category, there wasn't much "thrilling" about it (not meant to be

a slight)only it's not over the top in the usual thrilling sense associated with novels under this classification. There are no gun fights, no ripping down the streets in Mini's, and no horribly mangled gorrey dead bodies. It's a genuine mystery supported by interesting characters with a plausible, real plot that explores the depth of character and greed. I repeat I'm ashamed I haven't read this writer's work before now but as they say: better late than never.

Nancy (essayist) says

Donna Leon could write a book describing nothing but what the Commissario had for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and I would not only read it, I would savor every word. As usual in a Brunetti novel, there is a mystery here to be solved--not even a true police case this time around--and that mystery allows Leon to share what she thinks about the state of the world. While I tend to agree with her beliefs, I read her books primarily for the characters and the glimpse into their daily lives as Venetians. While others might find the descriptions--of how Guido read the paper in the morning or decided to take the vaparetto or stopped for a drink before heading back to the office--to be banal, for me those moments are the joy. In this outing, we learn a little more about some of Brunetti's colleagues, get a glimpse of his growing children, and see again the easy rapport he has with wife Paola. If I had one wish for Leon, it would be for her to go back to the characters of Guido's in-laws, a fascinating couple who have been absent from the series for far to long.

Angela Savage says

The Golden Egg is the twenty-second instalment in Donna Leon's Commissario Brunetti series set in Venice. As someone just finishing the third book in a crime fiction series, I find it astonishing that anyone could write twenty-two (and counting). Equally impressive is the author's ongoing ability to engage, entertain and surprise in this deceptively simple, ultimately harrowing story.

Brunetti is given the official task in The Golden Egg of making enquiries into a possible bribery case that might embarrass the mayor, a scenario the sartorially splendid Vice-Questore Patta is keen to avoid. Unofficially, at the behest of his wife Paola, he looks into the death of a deaf-mute man, who worked at the dry cleaners in the Brunettis' own neighbourhood. The man died from an overdose of sleeping pills, though whether intentionally or by accident is unclear.

What is puzzling about the man-child, identified as Davide Cavanella, is how little is known about him. While Patta's secretary, the indomitable Signorina Elettra, attends seminars on the newest techniques for combating identity theft and computer hacking, Brunetti tries to fathom how a man in his forties in highly bureaucratic Venice could leave so little trace.

Davide's mother seems angry and defensive when questioned about his death, which sets Brunetti off on a hunt for the truth, not only about the man's death but about his life.

The Golden Egg contains all the elements that make Leon's books a pleasure to read: familiar characters in Brunetti's family and colleagues, evocative descriptions of Venice, ruminations on Italian politics and society, both passionate and philosophical.

But this is no writing by numbers. Being such an established author with a loyal fan base allows Leon to deviate from the conventions of the genre. Rather than a dead body in the opening chapter, we get a glimpse into Brunetti's family life:

If the Brunettis had a religion, aside from a formal adherence to some of the outward decorative manifestations of Christianity, it was language. Pens and jokes, crossword puzzles and teasers were to their what communion and confirmation were to Catholics.

A dead body doesn't appear until Chapter 4, by which stage Brunetti has been given his official assignment.

It's only in retrospect that I realise how cleverly the story was crafted -- how the dynamics outlined in the first few chapters contribute to the impact of the ending. It was only at the end, too, that I realised the significance of the book's title.

The Golden Egg is the work of a master, entertaining, surprising and moving. Highly recommended.
