

Note from the Author

While researching *Death in the Floating City* I learned everything I could about Venice, a labyrinthine city more dependent on asymmetry than right angles, whose Renaissance citizens knew beyond a doubt that they were the center of Europe and superior to every other city. While the rest of Europe may not have agreed with the Venetians' hubris, there is no question that Venetians of the period were exposed to a broader world than many of their European counterparts. The trade that brought the city its seemingly endless riches also carried with it the culture of far-flung places, and the effects of this seeped into Venice itself. The architecture, art, as well as jewelry and clothing hinted at the exotic.

Readers who, like me, love the Victorian era are generally well versed in the social mores and culture of that period. We are accustomed to the idea of marriages being arranged to benefit family or dynastic status, to bring wealth or titles rather than love and devotion. Furthermore, we are keenly aware of the limitations women in particular faced in the 19th century. In this book, I wanted to present another culture, something at once exotic and familiar, to stand beside the familiar Victorian world. In Renaissance Venice, rules and customs restricted men nearly as much as women. Typically, only one son and one daughter per noble family was allowed to marry in an attempt to solidify and strengthen fortune and power. This idea that neither bride nor groom had a role in determining their future happiness struck a chord in me, and I knew almost at once that I wanted to explore the parallels in Victorian and Renaissance society. *Death in the Floating City*, with its two stories told in different centuries, allowed me to delve into this. In the novel, I introduce two couples forbidden by society to be together: in the 15th century, Nicolò and Besina, and in the 19th century, Angelo and Donata. Thinking about the two pairs is an excellent way to begin discussing the book.



A Reading Group Guide



St. Martin's
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Discussion Questions

1. Besina and Donata both fall in love with men it is impossible for them to have. How does each woman handle her situation? Discuss the differences in their decisions and the impact those decisions have on their relationships and on the people around them.
2. How are the two periods depicted in the novel similar and different? What about Renaissance Venice surprised you? Did learning about 15th century Venice impact the way you view the Victorians?
3. Emily is deeply affected by the poverty she sees in Venice. How does she react to it and what does she do to try to counter it? Do you think her strategy for “fixing” things is an effective one?
4. Why do you think Tomaso took the name Barozzi after his father’s death?
5. Travel and education have greatly opened Emily’s mind to new cultures, experiences, and, perhaps most importantly, have led her to a deeper understanding of the way human beings treat each other. How does her decision to help her childhood nemesis reflect this?

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