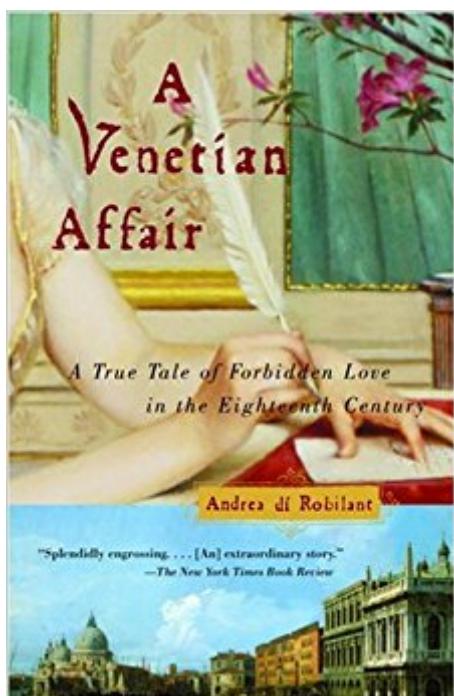


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A Venetian Affair: A True Tale Of Forbidden Love In The 18th Century



Synopsis

In the waning days of Venice's glory in the mid-1700s, Andrea Memmo was scion to one of the city's oldest patrician families. At the age of twenty-four he fell passionately in love with sixteen-year-old Giustiniana Wynne, the beautiful, illegitimate daughter of a Venetian mother and British father. Because of their dramatically different positions in society, they could not marry. And Giustiniana's mother, afraid that an affair would ruin her daughter's chances to form a more suitable union, forbade them to see each other. Her prohibition only fueled their desire and so began their torrid, secret seven-year-affair, enlisting the aid of a few intimates and servants (willing to risk their own positions) to shuttle love letters back and forth and to help facilitate their clandestine meetings. Eventually, Giustiniana found herself pregnant and she turned for help to the infamous Casanova himself infatuated with her. Two and half centuries later, the unbelievable story of this star-crossed couple is told in a breathtaking narrative, re-created in part from the passionate, clandestine letters Andrea and Giustiniana wrote to each other.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's hard to imagine a more romantic real-life story than the long, forbidden love affair of the 18th-century Venetian nobleman Andrea Memmo and a half-English beauty named Giustiniana Wynne. Andrea Di Robilant's *A Venetian Affair* is drawn in part from a cache of letters discovered by the author's father in his ancestral palazzo on the Grand Canal. In 1753, his ancestor Andrea Memmo had been introduced to a lovely girl of uncertain station (illegitimate, although her parents later married). The Wynnes's position was precarious enough in Venice's rigid society, and

Giustiniana's mother took every step to prevent the young aristocrat from corrupting her daughter. But the two lovers began to meet in secret: exchanging letters through confederates and communicating in public through an elaborate code of nods and gestures. They even came within a few days of being married before further dark revelations about Giustiniana's family put a permanent end to their hopes. Although Memmo went on to have an illustrious career in the dying Venetian Republic, it is Giustiniana's astonishing later life that really captures the reader. A Venetian Affair provides both a rich picture of the times--including cameo appearances by that scamp, Casanova--and a convincing account of an enduring passion. --Regina Marler --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

The genesis of this engaging book was a stash of letters the author's father found in the old family palazzo in Venice. Written in the mid-1700s by his ancestor, Andrea Memmo, scion of an ancient Venetian family, to Giustiniana Wynne, the illegitimate daughter of a British father and a Venetian mother, these letters helped complete the picture of a romance--much of which had been detailed in the memoirs of Giacomo Casanova--that has long intrigued scholars. Taking a novelistic approach, di Robilant, a correspondent for *La Stampa* in Rome, weaves a narrative around selected quotations from these letters. Andrea and Giustiniana met in 1753, when he was 24 and she was not yet 17. They fell in love but couldn't marry because of their different social positions and Venetian marriage customs that protected the interests of the ruling oligarchy. Giustiniana's mother, fearing that the affair would jeopardize her daughter's chance to make a respectable marriage, forbade her to see Andrea, so the two met secretly and carried on a clandestine correspondence, writing hundreds of passionate letters full of the intimate details of their daily lives and other love affairs. In 1758, her mother took Giustiniana and her siblings to London. On the way, Giustiniana, helped by Casanova, went to a French convent and secretly gave birth to a baby that may or may not have been Andrea's, though she never mentioned this to him in her letters. The letters by themselves can be somewhat repetitive, but by skillfully combining well-chosen passages with historical background, di Robilant spins a lively, poignant tale that says much about life in 18th-century Venice and the social mores of the time. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

I am an avid reader of historical fiction and usually dabble in non-fiction a few times a year. Venice seems to be a pull lately, and this wonderful and detailed account of two young lovers during the last days of Venice was a treat. First, it is thrilling to read a real life account of a love forbidden by

class and social snobbery, and two people who could not help themselves but to risk reputation, political power and wealth in spite of it all. Similar to fairy tales, Andrea Memmo and Giustiniana Wynne must contend with scheming enemies, jealous contenders and a watchful and foreboding mother, and in response they develop a secret code and a network of informants, allies and spies that spans Europe at times. Second, they were pals with Casanova. How could life in Venice or Paris be boring when Casanova is around? His exploits have lived on for 250 years - thus reading anything that bears witness to his world first hand is fascinating. Third, all is not roses in this romance. In addition to the aforementioned barriers to their love, they must also overcome infidelity, jealousy, distrust and large, looming secrets. Reading excerpts from their letters and seeing how they accomplish these feats is amazing. Giustiniana in particular shows astonishing cunning at times - and manages to accomplish a feat which today still seems impossible to the media and general public. Just goes to show how the more things change, the more they stay the same. Finally, the European scene during this time is fascinating in and of itself. I loved having the opportunity to witness it through Giustiniana's eyes and words, and watching her grow as well. We see her develop from a sheltered, dreamy adolescent into a worldly woman who was a century or more ahead of the rest of the world with regard to women's roles and freedoms. Her lost love, personal sacrifices and struggles to be accepted by society shaped her into a fascinating woman. Andrea Di Robilant deserves enormous thanks for bringing his father's dream into fruition by translating these letters, researching family and political history, and writing it all down to share with the world.

I wholeheartedly agree with all the readers who have praised Andrea di Robilant's elegant and stylish writing (since he is Italian, and thus English is not his first language, his merit is double). I also wish to praise his genuine involvement with his subjects, Andrea and Giustiniana, the warmth and respect with which he treats them, and the way he honours the love his late father felt for them. Enough has been said about the book's gripping development and the way in which it brings to life the colourful and (alas) terribly gossipy and poisoned Venetian society of the time. I will add that, in spite of its liveliness, I found the book tremendously sad and moving. You can actually feel the two lovers drifting apart, separated first by their different social circumstances, then by geographical distance. You suffer at the way they try to keep their relationship alive under a different form (as friends and "brothers") while silently mourning the imposed loss of their love. You wonder at the way in which they describe their other love affairs to each other, trying perhaps to make their unnatural estrangement (and subsequent need to go on with their lives) seem normal. And you marvel at the irony of a world which would not allow them to be together while both were single, but

which would permit their being lovers while Giustiniana was married, or after she had been widowed. Of course, many questions arise. One such, that kept surfacing in my mind, was whether they did strive hard enough. It was surprising to me that the alternative of elopement, or of getting married in spite of the consequences, was never seriously considered. If my assumptions are right, it would perhaps add another issue to this touching story of human feelings: whether their love was really that deep, or there was an element of obsession, and perhaps social defiance, that did not want to go that far. In any case, the story is wonderful and lends itself to varied readings, which Mr. di Robilant never imposes on the reader, presenting the naked facts (as far as they can be reconstructed) for each of us to make his or her very personal interpretation.

Good for kicking back

A true-live bodice ripper! Fiction doesn't get better or more outrageous than this heartbreakng story. Surrounded by the faded decadent glories of 18th century Venice, this book serves up a remarkable slice of history. It stretches from the palazzos of Venice to the court of Louis XVI to London and back... seduction, romance, infidelity, love found and lost, comedy, tragedy and skeletons popping out of the family closet! This is a beautifully, bitter-sweet family story that emerges from old love letters that is told with tenderness and compassion. I've passed out half a dozen copies of this book to friends. Whether your interest is in romance or specifically the history of Venice and the period, this is a must read.

Terrific history lesson on times in Italy, France and England during the late 1700's. I loved hearing the view of the times thru the main characters eyes. I learned much about life, rules, and politics in this time and place. Also, what a great romance. It is easy to relate, even today, on loves lost, loves that can not withstands the trails of time, loves that should not be.

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