



## The Venetian Mask

*Rosalind Laker*

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## **The Venetian Mask** Rosalind Laker

Enduring friendships and long-held vendettas come alive against the splendor and decadence of eighteenth-century Venice.

In 1775 Venice—known to outsiders as “the brothel of Europe”—the tradition of mask-wearing has allowed adultery and debauchery to flourish. But Marietta and Elena, two dear friends at the Ospedale della Pietà, a world-famous orphanage and music school for girls, know little of that milieu—until they come of age.

Elena is forced to wed the head of the Celano clan, a jealous, brutal man, while Marietta marries Domenico Torrisi, whose family vendetta with the Celanos is centuries old. Tradition dictates that the friends should never speak again, but their bond is too strong to break.

As the French Revolution unsettles all of Europe, Elena’s husband frames Domenico and he becomes a political prisoner. Marietta and Elena plot to save him, and the women discover that Venetian masks have noble purposes, too—but will their efforts put their own lives at risk?

Embodying the glitter and the treachery of the city it portrays, *The Venetian Mask* will keep you turning pages long into the night.

## **The Venetian Mask Details**

Date : Published March 25th 2008 by Broadway Books (first published January 1st 1992)

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Author : Rosalind Laker

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## From Reader Review *The Venetian Mask* for online ebook

### Liz says

Set in 18th-century Venice, this novel is about three orphaned girls who grow up together at a special charity music school called the *Ospedale della Pieta*. They are all brilliant musicians, but instead of pursuing their careers they decide to try their chances at love and making babies. In the process many Tragic and Dramatic Things happen (including, but not limited to: blood feuds, sudden and inexplicable deaths, false imprisonments, treachery and treason, pregnancy cover-ups and dungeons) and they must rely on their bond with each other to carry on.

This book had just about every over-used melodramatic trope it possibly could have had. You could see the "plot twists" coming from a mile away, and the characters left a lot to be desired. The good ones were all strong, gorgeous/handsome and could do no wrong, and the bad ones were all bad just for the sake of...being bad. The three women were very much put upon merely because they were women, and I think the author was trying to make a point about the unfairness of society at that time (which is a valid point), but it got old. There was sex scene fail here, too. I believe at one point there may have been reference made to a "golden stallion", but I have blocked it from my mind.

In other words it was pretty much a typical romance novel. It was very sappy.

At the same time, I kept reading it, although I can't exactly say why. It was an entertaining kind of bad. And the setting was interesting. I think if the characters had been more complex, the overall tone of the book had been less saccharine, and the author had actually thrown in something unpredictable every now and then it could actually have been pretty good.

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### Kim says

When you are spending 2 days in Venice it seems like a good idea to read historical fiction & this well-written gem was a delight. I found myself thinking of the locations described in the story ...

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### Thom Kay says

I have enjoyed the other books by Rosalind Laker and this one is no exception! Having visited Venice multiple times, I can easily picture the various places she describes throughout the story. She does a fantastic job developing the characters and weaving the plot but unlike some of her other books it is more focused on the fiction than on the history. All the same, the story draws you into the struggle between these characters as they grow up in the Pieta. I would heartily recommend this book for anyone that enjoys Italian travel or culture.

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### Clarissa Ward says

Great story! Had a odd writing style, to me, where from paragraph to paragraph the author could change perspective view from characters. Enjoyed the culture of Venice, cir early 1800's.

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### **Emma says**

This novel takes place in Venice, Italy during the late 1700s. Venice, known to outsiders as "the brothel of Europe" due to its excess in hedonism and debauchery, is also known for its many festivals including the infamous Carnival with its merry-making and masks and elaborate costumes. Marietta is only twelve years old when her mother died of illness and is left at the Ospedale della Pietà as an orphan. The orphanage is only for orphan young girls to be trained in singing and music. She befriends another orphan her same age, Elena. They go through the ups and downs of first love together that ends tragically for both. Elena is forced to see the head of the Delano clan, a jealous, brutal man, while Marietta marries Domenici Torrisi, whose family vendetta is centuries old. Tradition dictates that the friends should never speak again, but their bond is too strong to break. As the French Revolution unsettled all of Europe, Elena's husband frames Domenico and he becomes a political prisoner. Marietta and Elena plot to save him, and the women discover that Venetian masks have noble purposes, too - but will their efforts out their own lives at risk? Embodying the glitter and the treachery of the city it portrays, this novel will keep you turning pages long into the night.

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### **Cici Gordon says**

Excellent book - great story, great glimpse into life in Venice at that time. Keeps you very engaged.

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### **Amy Bruno says**

My love affair with Rosalind Laker began after reading *To Dance with Kings*. What a wonderful novel! And while I liked *The Venetian Mask*, I do agree with other reviewers that her novels have a bit of a pattern to them. However we are also in agreement that it doesn't make the story less for it. The story starts off slow, but no worries, it does pick up.

Laker transports the readers to 18th century Venice; see the majestic palaces that rise from the water along the Grand Canal, experience the decadence and licentiousness of The Carnival, and feel surrounded by the music...ahh...the sweet music. The gondoliers with their booming voices, often accompanied by violins or flutes, the street bands that played in the squares and the angelic voices of the Pietà girls.

Obviously venetian masks feature heavily in the story; the making of them we see through the eyes of Marietta and the various misdeeds that can be done while hiding underneath were quite intriguing. All in all, *The Venetian Mask* is a good read.

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### **Tamara says**

The plot described in the jacket copy of this novel doesn't even come into play until past the half-way point. I felt that it was much more "romance" than historical fiction, so I felt I had been misled. I was disappointed

and felt that it was simplistic.

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### **Kathleen DuVall says**

I'm not sure why I kept passing this on my reading list at the library but I did for several months. Previously having read and enjoyed *The Golden Tulip* it just didn't make sense. Maybe I just needed a break from historical fiction.

Regardless, I finally cracked open the ebook and started and once I got into it, I realized I should never have passed it over. It was a wonderful story of intrigue, deceit, pain, love, longing and happy endings. It highlighted the strength of bonds formed through difficult times and the power of love to sustain.

Interestingly, I also learned a lot about *The Carnival of Venice* and the practice of wearing different kinds of masks in normal society of the 1700's. In doing Google searches as I read about things in the book, I found some of the most beautiful masks and costumes that are still being made today. If ever I make it to Venice (still on my bucket list), I would love to see Carnival.

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### **Marie Winger says**

I thought this would be an historical novel but it is more of an historical romance. (I have to stop buying books from Book Bub.). I probably wouldn't have enjoyed it so much if I hadn't recently visited Venice and knew exactly where much of the action took place. Not a reader if romances I don't have much basis of comparison but it was engaging read. Well written, interesting characters, plot good enough to keep me going. It was a good travel book.

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### **Nichola says**

Mills & Boon meets a plot.

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### **Tahsina Syeda says**

Read this novel in a Reader's Digest Condensed collection when I was a kid, and it left a lasting impression. A Gothic novel set in the glittering, glamorous, ugly world of Venice.

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### **Fran says**

Great book about life in Venice circa 1700. The book concentrates on two girls raised in an orphanage and schooled in music. They grow and marry two opposing families. The story is chock full of adventure and thick plots. Very good read especially if you enjoy descriptions of Venice the way it use to be.

Merged review:

I love reading historical fiction and since this is a far cry from that it does show you Venice in the late 1700s taking many liberties....the Pieta...does exist...or at least did as it was portrayed in the book. It is a very romantic historical account about a girl who was brought to an orphanage in Venice when her mask-making mother took ill and died. Marietta met and befriended Eleana in the orphanage and the two of them ended up marrying the "Hatfield and MacCoys". The story takes you through Marietta's life in the orphanage to become a prima donna singer and then into her marriage into nobility in the Venice of the 1700s...very good book and it kept my interest even through the romantic nonsense entwined with the historic viewpoints of that era...

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### **Rusty says**

This is a wonderful read about two friends in 1775 Venice. Both are singers who must marry wealthy men. Remember that women have few rights and privileges in this era. However, the men the friends marry are vicious enemies. For Elena whose love dies from illness just prior to their marriage, marriage to his brother, Filippo, is a nightmare. He is cruel, abusive and jealous. For Marietta who loses her first love to another through deceit, her marriage to Domenico Torrisi is all she could ever hope to have. The two friends find it difficult to keep in touch because of the feuding of their husbands' families yet the friendship perseveres. Life for both becomes very complicated as the tale moves on. I truly enjoyed this book.

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### **Kelly says**

The Venetian Mask by Rosalind Laker is a dramatic and romantic novel about two orphaned girls, who reside in the famous Ospedale Della Pieta. The Pieta is renowned for its beautiful and innocent girls, who are presented to society through their music and artistic talents. Marietta and Elena, as they reach adulthood, each engage in personal and often devastating pursuits for love, all the while maintaining that cherished and long-lasting friendship that they have created.

Like many other romance novels, I am left feeling utterly confused by this book. I both love and hate it. I love the sweeping romances, the implausible plot-lines and the daring schemes which occur. However, I did not enjoy the writing, nor did I find the characters particularly believable.

Rosalind tends to narrate the book in the viewpoint of whomever is most important to the plot. However, as these perspectives are not segmented into chapters, there is often a quick and random switch to other characters, which can not only get incredibly confusing but also annoying. By knowing other characters thoughts, an element of mystery is also lost, as key moments are divulged to the reader without a focus on suspense.

The characters also could have been written with more flaws. Although that may sound bitter, especially as all females are explained as being impossibly beautiful, there is something to be said about being normal. However, all four of the main characters are popular for their beauty or their hair or some other characteristic which has men dying over them. With the knowledge that they are beautiful, it's difficult to see any real personal development occur about their bodies, as everything is always connected to a lover's opinion on beauty or a tragedy of sickness. As these are young girls, it was strikingly odd to read about characters who

felt absolutely convinced that they were beautiful.

I also thought that her portrayal of them was really strange. Rosalind definitely tries to make them seem quite individual, feminist and strong willed. However, a lot of what happens and the way that they interact with others around them does not seem to encourage this view point. The women's dependency on male attention is incredibly evident, especially as their inability to refuse attention from higher classed men often leads them into horrifying situations. While I understand that they are repressed and such, being women in that time period, their endless pursuit for love and attention by men makes them seem almost needy and desperate.

The plot-lines were also very familiar territory and I did not really feel that the authoress took a chance with her story. It was very much the unhappy wife, the barren woman, the disappointed lover or the pinning young gentlemen. While she pulled these stories off quite well, it would have been interesting to have included the rawer side of Venice, as in the prostitutes, smugglers and thieves. By focusing so intently on the nobility, it was almost a disconnect from the fact that there were other sides to the floating city. While she made it very clear that the nobility were heavily flawed, she did not venture past that class and into the poorer regions, which would have been really interesting.

However, as a lover of Venice who had just returned from the city, I was really drawn into the book by the authoress's ability to create atmosphere or really enrich the scene with her explanations of scenery. She quite romantically builds a scene of the city.

Although I really enjoyed her explanations of the city and the plot-lines that, although predictable, were entertaining, I don't think I can give this book any higher than a two star rating. As the rating states, 'it was okay,' but I can definitely see the flaws in it.

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