

The Gondola Maker

Laura Morelli

Laura Morelli (March 2014)

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Luca Vianello's future is set in stone: from inheriting the family gondola business to his betrothal to Annalisa, the blacksmith's daughter. But when his mother dies, Luca's future changes with one angry sweep of his own hand. In a 16th-century tale filled with as many twists and turns as the Venetian canals the story is set around, Laura Morelli deftly crafts a character that begs to be followed in her debut novel, *The Gondola Maker*.

Luca doesn't know how to tell his father he wants something different from what's planned for him—he just doesn't know what that might be. The day his mother dies, he argues with his father, accidentally setting fire to the family boatyard. Uncertain of the trouble he's in, Luca runs. He sleeps on the streets or under the tarp of a gondola tied up for the night, but he's not safe or comfortable until he finally finds employment as the private gondolier for a prominent artist. It's here that Luca meets Giuliana Zanchi—the girl who will change the course of his future yet again.

Laura Morelli's extensive research into 16th-century Venice and the art of gondola making brings history to the present. Descriptions and explanations intertwine, creating a believable setting and a connection to the narrator. When Luca begins restoring an old gondola, he says, "I close my eyes and run my hands along its hull, recognizing only by touch the familiar shape and curves, as if it were a long-lost love. My fingertips divine its familiar surfaces, textures, its musty scent, its imperfections, its singular beauty."

Even though Morelli's research builds the foundation of the novel, the information in no way overshadows the story itself. Luca's journey to pursue his own dreams creates cataclysmic action and turning points—from near starvation to love at first sight. Each of these moments build upon the other, placing Luca's survival and happiness at the forefront. There are, however, a few minor instances where a brief deluge of historical facts gets in the way of clarity within a scene, but Morelli recovers the pace quickly.

The detailed research throughout *The Gondola Maker* will delight avid historians, but Morelli's easy, beautiful writing style weaving through the pages will draw in readers of all genres.

KANDY ALAMEDA (Summer 2014)

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