



## The Venetian Contract

*Marina Fiorato*

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## **The Venetian Contract** Marina Fiorato

1576. Five years after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the Battle of Lepanto, a ship steals unnoticed into Venice bearing a deadly cargo. A man more dead than alive disembarks and staggers into Piazza San Marco. He brings a gift to Venice from Constantinople. Within days the city is infected with bubonic plague—and the Turkish Sultan has his revenge. But the ship also holds a secret stowaway—Feyra, a young and beautiful harem doctor fleeing a future as the Sultan's concubine. Only her wits and medical knowledge keep her alive as the plague ravages Venice. In despair the Doge commissions the architect Andrea Palladio to build the greatest church of his career—an offering to God so magnificent that Venice will be saved. But Palladio's own life is in danger too, and it will require all skills of medico Annibale Cason, the city's finest plague doctor, to keep him alive. But what Annibale had not counted on was meeting Feyra, who is now under Palladio's protection, a woman who can not only match his medical skills but can also teach him how to care.

## **The Venetian Contract Details**

Date : Published June 21st 2012 by John Murray (first published 2012)

ISBN : 9781848545656

Author : Marina Fiorato

Format : Hardcover 400 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Cultural, Italy, Romance, Fiction, Literature, 16th Century,  
Historical Romance

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## From Reader Review The Venetian Contract for online ebook

### **KOMET** says

About 4 years ago, I visited Venice purely by chance because it was a short distance from Trieste on the Adriatic (a city that attracted my interest, in part, because of its Habsburg past). Ever since, it has been Venice that has held me in thrall. So, when one of my fellow booklovers recently gave me "The Venetian Contract" as a gift, I was curious to see what this book had to offer.

The story begins in Venice during 1576. Plague has descended upon the city-state and its leader, the Doge (who, in an earlier life, had been a Grand Admiral who helped defeat the Ottoman Empire 6 years earlier in the decisive Battle of Lepanto) is in search of a cure. He distrusts the official doctors who hover round him like crows in their austere dark vestments, filled with a conceit that comes from an unassailable belief in their own unique skills in the medical arts/sciences to eradicate all forms of pestilence and disease. The Doge is a devout man, and seeking God's favor, commissions one of Venice's greatest architects (Andrea Palladio) to build a church. For as he expressed to Palladio: "Don't you see? God is punishing Venice. We need an offering, a gift so great that we will turn the edge of the divine anger and stay His hand from smiting our city. If medicine cannot help us, then we must turn to prayer. You, Andrea, you will build a church, on the ruins of the convent of Santa Croce. You will work in the footsteps of Saint Sebastian and build a church so wonderful, so pleasing to the glory of God, that it rivals His creation. And when you are done, the people will come, in their hundreds and thousands, and turn to God; they will praise Him with their voices and thank Him upon their knees. The power of prayer will redeem us all."

In the meantime, across the sea in Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, there is a young woman, Feyra Adelet bint Timurhan Murad, daughter of a distinguished sea captain, who, in her own right, is a skilled doctor and special servant to Nur Banu, the widow of the late Sultan Selim. Nur Banu dies a slow, agonizing death under mysterious circumstances, but not before disclosing to Feyra a long, hidden personal secret. She also gives Feyra a special piece of jewelry and a set of riddles for her to solve. Nur Banu's son (a greedy, grasping 19 year old who had no great love for his mother, only the desire to rule and exert absolute power over his subjects) becomes Sultan. He seeks to make Feyra his concubine. But before he could bring this about, Feyra manages to escape her family home (which the new Sultan had put under guard) and sneaks aboard a ship headed to Venice with a deadly cargo.

Upon arrival (by stealth, for the ship on which she travelled was on a secret mission for the Sultan) in Venice, Feyra will be plunged into a series of dramatic events in which her life becomes enmeshed with the destiny of a self-assured Dottore (who, with the blessing of the Doge's chief advisor, the Camerlengo, is able to secure the use of a small island for the treatment of people afflicted with the Plague) --- as well as the lives of Palladio and the Doge himself.

This is a story that has all the hallmarks of a lively, heart-stopping novel with elements of love, tragedy, and triumph. The author brings out the character and spirit of Venice that anyone who has travelled there will appreciate. This is a novel that comes **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**.

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### **Suzanne Keetch** says

I loved this book. The writing brought vivid pictures to my mind as the story wove its way along a path I didn't want to end. This historical novel takes place in Venice and Turkey during the Ottoman Empire, a time period I didn't know much about. This book definitely goes on my "favorites" list.

## Lauren K says

A well-researched historical fiction novel set in 1576, spanning across Turkey and Venice. Freya, a twenty-one year old harem doctor has worked for the Turkish Sultan most of her life, providing medical aid to his concubines. When her mistress (the Sultan's mother) is poisoned and reveals on her death-bed that she is Feyra's biological mother she sets her on a mission to speak to the Doge in Venice. When the Sultan's men turn up on her door-step advising she is to wed the Sultan (her half-brother!) once her father sails his ship to Venice on a secret mission, Feyra plans her escape. Hiding in the cargo of her father's ship, she meets a man who dying from the plague. She realises her father's mission is to deposit the man in Venice and spread the plague, weakening the city before Turkey invade for the war.

When her father dies of illness, Feyra must find a way to survive in a city where she is an outcast. She must lose her headscarf and modest clothing to fit into the less conservative Venetian lifestyle. She becomes a housemaid to Palladio, an architect summoned by the Doge to build a church to save Venice from the plague. When someone exposes her existence to the Doge, Feyra flees with Palladio's doctor, Annibale Cason who Feyra refers to as the Birdman because of the distinct mask he wears to protect himself from the plague. Annibale is the city's best plague doctor and has set up a hospital on a Venetian island to quarantine the sick.

Feyra is a strong-willed and intelligent young woman and makes for a likeable heroine. Annibale is reserved and brusque and has always kept everyone at arm's length. But Feyra manages to get under his skin and he learns to value her not just as a useful doctor in the Hospital but as a woman and an equal. Despite their differing religious, cultural and medical practices they form a deep friendship that begins to cross the threshold of intimacy. They must decide whether they will dishonour their faith for love.

The Venetian Contract has a slow start, but by the half-way mark I was completely engrossed. The author skilfully tells Feyra's story and the city of Venice comes to life through her writing. The novel is told in third person from various viewpoints- mainly Feyra's and Annibale's but sometimes there were two POV's in the one scene which made it difficult to relate to one character at a time. Regardless, I really enjoyed her writing style and the well-researched historical details coupled with a strong, likeable heroine. I particularly found interesting the ancient medical treatments really fascinating and their wild bird costumes!

I'd recommend this book to historical fiction fans who have a hankering for historical details and a female protagonist who successfully infiltrates a male-dominated career in an oppressed era.

3.5 stars

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## Aoi says

**3.5 stars**

Picking the Venetian Contract up, I did not know what to expect looking at the rather unimaginative title. In spite of my misgivings, I was quickly drawn into the exotic and opulent world of 16th century Istanbul and Venice- the two great empires at war across an ocean.

Feyra, the daughter of a ship captain in the Ottoman empire, is also the extremely skilled doctor of the

Sultan's harem. Her idyllic life abruptly comes to an end, when the dying Valide Sultan commands her to leave all that she's known and seek asylum with the Doge of Venice. Sneaking aboard her father's ship, she realizes there is a lot more than trading goods in the cargo- in fact, she has unknowingly ensconced herself with the Sultan's weapon to vanquish all of Venice.

You could safely say the book might have been rated lower, had it not been for the sense of atmosphere the author creates. The smell and texture of the herbs Feyra uses, the vividly sketched details of the lofty cathedrals and imposing minarets, the dank and dark atmosphere of a city become victim to Black Death, the ever lurking danger and superstition doing rounds amongst the masses- all fairly leapt from the pages. The historical descriptions are so well done- I could imagine the Venetian *dottore* Annibale Carson in his voluminous work garb, his face covered with a grotesque beak mask.

***In quiet moments she would dig graves alongside the sisters companionably enough, in silent respect for those that had gone, both faiths mouthing their parallel prayers.***

The underlying thread of cultural discrepancy weaves itself through the narrative- highlighting the age-old battles of Eastern Islam vs Western Catholicism, and their influences on art, architecture and the study of medicine, as the protagonists struggle to find common ground and combat the pestilence. I appreciated the way their contradictory ideology and dialogue form the backbone of their relationship, and showcases the fact that the greater good can be found in this duality.

***They laid siege to the hospital; she was Saladin, he was the Lionheart, and the Tezon was their Holy City. Neither East nor West could prevail, and the supremacy exchanged hands almost daily in a constant stalemate.***

For all the good points, the narrative does drag on a bit in few parts of the book. While Ms. Fiorato maintains a sense of intrigue and danger with her dialogue, the lull in the narrative somewhat dims the immediacy as the mystery unfolds. The pacing, especially where the romance is concerned, could have been done much better. (view spoiler)

Nevertheless, it is a welcome read for those looking for a fresh setting in their historical fiction.

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## **Mitch says**

A great book for anyone interested in historical fiction or Venice. I really liked *The Venetian Contract* because Fiorato's seamlessly weaved well researched historical details with a very likable heroine and a really good plot, resulting in a thoroughly satisfying read that just got more and more engrossing as the book unfurled. Sixteenth century Venice really came alive in all its glory and faults. But more importantly, Feyra is just such an interesting character, I didn't even know there were women doctors at that time, but now I feel her character really exemplifies what female doctors must've gone through back then.

That's right, the summary's kind of misleading. Beyond the prologue, *The Venetian Contract* focuses on Feyra, the aforementioned beautiful half-Turkish half-Venetian harem doctor who sneaks into Venice with the Plague sent by the Ottoman Sultan. She sort of annoyed me at first because she's one of those characters who's written as knowing she's very beautiful yet doesn't think very highly of her looks and doesn't understand the attention she gets, but thankfully her looks don't feature much into the plot at all. Instead, it's about her conflicted loyalties between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, huge rivals at the time, and also between Christianity and Islam. She has to decide whether her oath as a doctor compels her to aid Venice during the Plague, while evading the Sultan's wrath and Venetian authorities too since she still is a Muslim

woman and one of the city's enemies. Watching her trying to figure out her place in the whole mess as she stumbles along and gains acceptance from mistrusting Venetians as she treats victims of the Plague was very interesting, all the way to the end, although I think the latter half was a little rushed in places and her conflict over her divided loyalties could've been fleshed out a little more at the end. Not a lot of straight action but still very entertaining. Oh, and yes there is a romance in this book, one of those young hotshot male doctor's annoyed the female doctor he has an initial low opinion of's messing with his patients deals.

Even better, though, is the history Fiorato's crammed into this book. *The Venetian Contract* doesn't dwell on the background behind the conflict but uses a few key characters, Feyra's parents, Sultan Murad III, Takat Turan, plus the general attitude of the Venetians and the Turks, to show just how much the two sides hate each other. Really builds up the intrigue. But a lot of other things came alive too, Andrea Palladio's architecture, Feyra's love of her native Constantinople, heck even the city of Venice itself - it's clear Fiorato sure knows her stuff. I already knew a lot of the background and loved seeing the many many historical name drops, the great Ottoman architect Sinan, Leonardo da Vinci's works, the story of how Venice ended up with the relics of Saint Mark. There's a lot of very interesting truth in this book. And the most memorable? Plague doctors, men who treated plague victims while wearing garish bird costumes. Feyra's attitude towards them was pretty much my own, so it was nice to get Annibale's point of view as well and really made that profession really interesting. Nice to know medieval medicine's not completely crock and there's at least two people who know a thing or two and want to figure out more about treating diseases, even back then (at least fictionally). But I was hooked from the moment the six plague doctors in their bird masks swooped in to meet the Doge like a murder of crows.

I would definitely recommend this to anyone looking for a historical fiction focusing on sixteenth century Venice, but there's enough here I think would interest and satisfy anyone. 4.5 stars, nearly perfect.

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### **Katri says**

A story of Renaissance Venice, the Ottoman Empire, a Turkish woman and a Venetian doctor who join their forces to battle a horrifying plague epidemic amidst signs of apocalypse, while an old architect is building a magnificent church to appease God. The story is wonderfully written with a luxury of details that made the Renaissance Venice spring to life before my eyes, transporting me to another place and time so wonderfully I forgot everything else. I loved the choices of characters and subject matter, very unique, not just repeating the same old stories but showing how many stories there can be to tell about different times, places and people.

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### **ZEYNEP DERYA says**

\*2,5 stars\*

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## Amy says

Excuse me while I fangirl for a moment...

This book was absolutely beautiful. I don't usually manage to finish Historical Fiction novels, because they always seem to have the same storyline and outcome, and after a while my (extremely short) attention span gets in the way, and I end up doing ANYTHING except actually reading. But for some reason, I couldn't put *The Venetian Contract* down.

I don't know why. Really I don't. It didn't have vampires, or werewolves, or sexy aliens (yes, I am still hooked on the Lux series, don't judge me). It didn't have a hot hero to drool over. It didn't have a mystery woven into the story. Hell, it wasn't even set in this time period. But what it DID have was the Black Death (aka Bubonic Plague, Black Plague, or even just The Plague)... And Venice. Now that I think about it, that was probably the reason for my absolute obsession with this book.

If you've read any of my other reviews of Historical Fiction novels (read my review for *Blood Red, Snow White* here: <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>), or anything to do with History, you'll probably have noticed that I am a bit of a History nerd. Okay, a LOT of a History nerd. History-obsessed-psychopath-who's-constantly-preoccupied-with-the-middle-ages is probably the most correct term. And I love Venice. Probably because I've been there, so throughout the book, my friends, family and teachers had to deal with me shouting out: "I WAS THERE! SEE? READ THIS PARAGRAPH. YOU KNOW THAT PLACE? I WAS THERE!!" Yup, I am just that cool. So that was DEFINITELY the reason I loved it so much.

But really. Even if I wasn't totally obsessed with the Black Death, I would have loved this book. Sure, you sort of have to like History to be able to read Historic novels, so I wouldn't recommend this to anybody who hates anything to do with the past. Or people like some of my friends who just respond with, "Yeah, whatever. Guess what rock that is?" when I try to tell them about my latest Historical obsession (Geography nerds...). But *The Venetian Contract* was seriously one of the best books I have read in the past few years. And even though I absolutely love my vampires and werewolves, aliens and fairies, it was really nice to find a book to read that didn't have anything to do with supernatural beings in it.

Adding to the fact that this book was amazing because of the History behind it as well as in it, the writing was exceptional. I had to mentally prepare myself to come back into this world every time I wanted to put it down. I also loved the way that the story was told from the perspective of a Turk, and not a Venetian. It made the novel just that much more interesting.

So to all my fellow History nerds out there, READ THIS BOOK. Seriously. You won't regret it.

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## Sandi \*~The Pirate Wench~\* says

Setting: 1576 Venice  
Steam factor: Mild-Hot  
3 1/2 Stars

When a very vengeful Turkish Sultan sends a man riddled with plague to ravage Venice, the Doge's distrust of medicine compels him to seek God's favour by hiring one of Venice's greatest architects Andrea Palladio, to design a church.

On the same ship that brought the illness is a skilled physician named Feyra who is fleeing from the Sultan. Feyra is then quickly thrust into the city's now fight for survival.

The lives then of the Doge, the doctor and Annibale Carson who has been given permission to treat the sick on an island, become now entwined with Andrea Palladio.

Annibale and Feyra both have secrets and must learn to tread very carefully if they have any hope at all to find a cure and a future together.

The authors passion for the Italian Renaissance, as well as for the city of Venice really show here in her latest imaginative and colorful story.

The historical details in the book were really good, and will have you believing you are there seeing the building of the church and hearing the cries of the victims of the plague.

In this story is also a cross-cultural love story that was very touching but could have been a little better written IMO.

There were also a few times in the story ( as I have found in her other books that I have read ) that I felt or got a little lost or confused, and I found the pacing of the story very slow but as I continued to read I was able to get right back into it.

Not my favourite of hers but still a good read.

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### **Azra Timur says**

Can?n?z bir gün benim gibi hadi bir tarihi roman okuyum derse, evet okuyabilirsiniz. Sevdi?imiz yerler, sevdi?imiz hikayeler. Kitab?n özellikle ikinci yar?s? sürükleyici de. Ama tavsiye eder miyim bilmiyorum, kurgu eksik bir?eyler var sanki....

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### **Jenny Q says**

#### **Giveaway thru May 11th @ Let Them Read Books!**

4.5 Stars. Marina Fiorato can bring medieval Italy to life like no one else! Though I have all of her novels sitting on my shelves, I've only had the chance to read one other, *The Daughter of Siena*, and I was so impressed with how she was able to transport me so completely to the time period. She's done it again in *The Venetian Bargain*. There's one particular scene that stands out in my memory, where Feyra finds herself lost upon her arrival in Venice, frantically running through a twilit maze of strange streets, amidst the fog, the smoke of fires, the shadows thrown by cressets and lamps, encountering strange people in masks both beautiful and terrifying, the sounds echoing off the water . . . I was there, and I was just as awe-struck and frightened as Feyra. The whole novel is like that. I won't call it a treat for the senses, as this is a very dark time in Venetian history with pestilence and death everywhere, but it is thoroughly transporting.

And peopled with terrific characters too. The keeper of life-changing secrets, forced from the only home she's ever known, and a world where she was respected and renowned for her medical skills, Feyra is tossed upon the shores of Fate, only to end up in a city surrounded by enemies who would kill her for the color of her shoes, and surrounded by the very death she inadvertently helped bring upon the city of Venice. She alone is in a unique position to ease their suffering, but women are not allowed to practice medicine in Venice as they are in Constantinople. Feyra must focus instead on surviving, hiding from those who would see her dead, and starting her life over in the world of the infidel. She is fortunate in that her one friend in the city has friends in high places, and she finds herself in the household of the master architect Andrea Palladio, who has been tasked with rebuilding a temple that will appease God and save Venice from the pestilence. An unlikely friendship forms, and Feyra influences Palladio's design with her descriptions of Eastern churches. But Feyra is still not safe, and as the plague continues to rage unabated in Venice, she is forced to take refuge in the one place no one is likely to come looking for her: the plague island.

Annibale Cason is a brilliant young doctor fresh out of university at Padua. Disgusted with the Venetian doctors' ineffectual medicines and schemes to make money off of the ill and dying, he creates his own hospital far from the center of the city, where he can test his own theories in an effort to stem the spread of contagion. He is not best pleased to have an assistant forced on him by the Doge's powerful ally, Andrea Palladio, but he'll not risk the destruction of his hospital, so he allows Feyra to join him. Disconcerted by her beauty and her foreign beliefs, he soon has to concede that she is well educated in medicine, and that some of her ideas may actually be better than his own. As the pair grow close, bonding over their love of medicine and their patients, they fall in love. But just when they both think they may have found where their hearts and their futures lie, Feyra's secret past comes after her with a vengeance, placing the man she loves and everything they have worked so hard for in danger . . .

Oh, this was such a good book and such a great love story! In fact, my only complaint is that with such a wonderful love story, so fraught with obstacles to happily ever after, I really was expecting much more of a romantic payoff at the end, and I felt a little gypped that I didn't quite get it. But all's well that end's well, and y'all know me--I'm a hopeless romantic. Other readers probably won't find a thing wrong with the ending. There's plenty of historical context here too, and historical figures mingle with the fictional. I had not previously been aware of the depth of animosity between the Ottoman Empire and Venice, and I loved getting a window into this era of history, hatred, and warfare. I was also fascinated by the portrait of medieval medicine, and how the encroachment of enlightenment and science were battling with long-held practices based on superstition and religion. All around, I found *The Venetian Bargain* to be another lush, engrossing, transporting, and utterly unputdownable story from Marina Fiorato, and one that any lover of historical fiction should add to their list!

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### **Jennifer says**

3.5 stars. I enjoyed this novel set in Venice during the plague of 1576, which wiped out a third of the Venetian population. It was particularly interesting to read of the 'birdmen' of Venice--the doctors with their beaked masks. The male protagonist, Annibale, was one such doctor and the author portrayed him as a young man with modern ideas that were looked down upon by the other doctors of the district. He therefore finds himself alone with an idea for an isolation island. One such island did exist during this time period and thus the author's story is born. She makes Annibale the founder of the island and the isolation it provides becomes the perfect place to hide for the female protagonist of the story, Feyra.

A young Turkish girl who has run away from her role as doctor to the Sultan's harem in Constantinople, her religion makes her the victim of hate in Venice and therefore she is in need of refuge. Working side by side with Annibale the two form a strong attachment despite their differences in both cultural and medicinal practices. In many ways Feyra's Ottoman views of medicine are much more forward-thinking than Annibale's are and she is also very intelligent, meaning he comes to respect her in more ways than one. What was particularly interesting to me was how, told from Feyra's perspective, I was able to have a better understand of why a woman would wish to cover herself, especially from men's eyes. Feyra does not view it as a mark of deference to men, but rather as a comfort to herself that makes her feel more confident, not to mention that her mind becomes the most prominent attribute to others. It was an interesting portrayal and it has given me a much greater understanding of the concept.

The inclusion of the architect Palladio was not actually the main body of the story as the synopsis made me believe, but rather a side narrative that allowed the author to show how the Venetian people felt the plague was a sign of God's disapproval. By building a great church Palladio and the Doge of Venice hoped to please God and that the city's suffering would end. Compared to Annibale and Feyra's daily toil of helping the plague victims and their families it just doesn't quite add up the same way to me, but nonetheless the city responds well to Palladio's church and it becomes a symbol of hope. Hope can go a long way, and the fact that even now people still gather together at the church every July to celebrate the city's deliverance from

plague is remarkable. Palladio would be proud.

Overall, an enjoyable novel with many interesting characters and a good plot.

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### **Maja says**

3,5 stars

When I picked this book up at the library, I was thinking that will be historical romance. But it wasn't. It's only historical fiction. And it was good and interesting. It set in Venice. I was once there and it's beautiful place.

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### **Anastasja Kostic says**

Ja sam htela neko lagano letnje štivo i onda sam nabasala na ovo i mogu samo da kažem da je ovo bilo mu?enje i da ne?u više sebe podvrgavati suludim idejama o laganom letnjem štivu. Ako volite istorijske romane presko?ite ovo jer je jako glupo napisano, ovoliko neverovatnih spletova okolnosti u životu nisam videla. Naslov je užasan i nema mnogo veze sa pri?om , jer ovo uopšte nije ljubavna pri?a ,ovo je više hvalospev nepostoje?oj glavnoj junjakinji koja je prelepa , prepametna ,nezavisna ima fotografsko pam?enje i sve joj ide od ruke.

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### **Nura says**

The Venetian Contract is a historical fiction book written by Marina Fiorato. It contained a well-researched historical detail from the sixteenth century Venice. The main character of the book is Feyra- a half Turk half Venetian harem doctor who manages to sneak into Venice from the Ottoman lands. The Ottomans and Venice were rivals at that time and that caused a lot of conflict between each other especially towards Christianity and Islam (which made the book even more interesting!). This book referred a lot to many historical characters including Leonardo Da Vinci and the famous Ottoman architect Sinan. My favorite part was when the plague hit Venice and a lot of the Venetian male doctors who treated the plague wore garish bird costumes, which I found extremely hilarious! I loved the book's portrayal of women especially female doctors at that time. What I enjoyed most was learning some facts about the sixteenth century in Venice. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who is interest in historical fiction. I am surprised to say that I wasn't expecting this book to be a page-turner. I started reading it with no expectations what so ever at what a page-turner it was I couldn't help but race through the pages to know what's happening next!

I was expecting a little more detail regarding the Ottoman Empire but was disappointed when the majority came from sixteenth century Venice. I admired Fiorato's writing style that made the 16th century Venice come back to life. It is vibrant, poetic, romantic and captivating.

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### **Barb says**

Requires Too Much Suspension of Disbelief

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I was excited about this novel, I'd never read a book by this author before but the set up for the story intrigued me and I liked that it sounded somewhat unusual. I was eager to read a story about the plague in Venice with a protagonist, who happens to be a female doctor. The premise of the story sounded interesting; Feyra, a doctor who tended the women of the Sultan's harem in Constantinople, flees to Venice on the same ship as a victim of the plague. The man brings the plague to Venice infecting the city with the disease. In an attempt to placate God the Doge of Venice commissions Andrea Palladio to build a new church. Palladio will need the skills of a clever doctor to keep him healthy and protect him from the plague. Annibale Cason, is the physician who attends Palladio and in his home he meets Feyra Adelet.

In Constantinople Feyra is a knowledgeable and capable woman who through her continued work and care of the Sultan's harem has risen to the position of doctor. Her greatest supporter has always been the Sultan's mother who taught her to read and encouraged her continued learning. Feyra never imagines leaving her home but decides to do so in order to escape the fate the Sultan has chosen for her.

Up to this point in the story I was interested but as I continued reading I had a hard time with several key plot points that had this clever, capable woman doing and saying stupid things that conveniently furthered the suspense of the story but in my opinion weren't believable. The first thing she did in this vein was fairly insane, given the circumstances she was in I found it ridiculous and at page 131 I almost gave up the book based on that one event alone. I actually surveyed my family to ask them what they thought and whether I should continue reading. They voted for me to give the book a heave and move on. I kept reading but never enjoyed the story after that. Feyra continued to make 'convenient to the plot' mistakes as well as finding some 'too convenient' good fortune. One outcome of that unlikely good fortune was her survival of the voyage to Venice.

When the focus of the story shifted to include Andrea Palladio I hoped the story would improve. But I continued to find the writing awkward and unpolished. I think this story could have been improved upon with some rewriting and editing to smooth the rough edges. Some of the problems I had with the story were that I never really felt Feyra's yearning to return to her homeland, though it's referred to several times. I also never felt the attraction between Feyra and Annibale. Overall there wasn't any real depth of emotion of any kind and so many things that happened felt very pat and superficial. Or that they only happened to move the story along and tie the threads together. Feyra's use of a particular name when she decides to invent a fiction to aid her success in selling a remedy for the plague is another example. I also kept wondering about the passage of time, Feyra was in Venice long enough "to become accustomed to the Venetian dress" but how long was that? Finally at page 284 we're given some information about the passage of time. Other things bothered as well; the description of the Venetian's sounding like a hive of bees and waving their hands so much they knocked the candles from their sconces, the reference to a Faustian spirit felt anachronistic and Feyra's failure to medicate certain characters was another unbelievable event that added drama to the story.

I'm sure that most readers won't notice or care about the things that bothered me. But this review is about my experience and I have to say it wasn't a good one, I won't be looking for another novel by this author and I can't recommend this to readers who have similar tastes to mine.

Thank you to the publisher, St. Martin's Griffin and the Amazon Vine program for the ARC which was given in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Rachael McDiarmid says**

As my friends know, two of my loves are Venice and reading historical fiction. Combine the two and it can be glorious! There's something truly wonderful reading a work of fiction set in Venice - particularly if you

know the city and its history rather well. I've had my eye on Marina Fiorato for a while, reading several of her books. With this latest book (read prior to publication as an advance reading copy) I'm pleased she has continued to develop her style and storytelling abilities. This book is set in 1576 and we are introduced to two very different worlds - one Turkish and one Venetian. It is the story of Feyra who has healing skills and medical knowledge - and a personal history that will unravel throughout the book. She stows away on a ship bound for Venice - with deadly cargo. The Sultan has sent the city the gift of the plague. Over the course of the book we will spend time with Palladio, in whose house she seeks refuge, and learn the history of Redentore on Guidecca, one of the so called "plague churches" in Venice. We will see her grapple with faith and fall in love. And we will learn something about the role of women in the 1500s and the place of a learned, interesting and professional woman who has the ability to heal plus so much more. I really enjoyed this book. It was a good, easy read. The only thing that lets it down is the title. 'The Venetian Contract' is a tad uninspiring. Surely the publisher could have come up with something better? Other than that, if you liked her other books, you won't be disappointed.

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## **Cora ? Tea Party Princess says**

**5 Words: Family, religion, Venice, medicine, plague.**

I loved this book. I love this author. I need more.

Marina Fiorato manages to weave a feminist tale while still sticking fiercely to the constraints of the historical era in which the story is set. Everything is plausible. She writes passionately, with sublime descriptions and strong characters. I could see every vista, smell the tang of smoke and smouldering herbs, almost feel the heat of a fire or cool water upon my skin. The writing is incredibly immersive and I could not put this down.

I loved how different cultures, religions and beliefs were explored in story, how there was this underlying theme of intolerance that gradually gave way to understanding and acceptance. There was a hint of the forbidden, and any romance was merely something that naturally happened to the characters rather than something driving the plot, and it wasn't integral to the story.

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## **Amy Bruno says**

There's always a bit of trepidation when starting a book by an author that you've never read before, but sometimes the risk pays off in spades. Case in point THE VENETIAN BARGAIN by Marina Fiorato. Holy moly, how in the world I haven't read her yet I can't say, I'm just glad that I took the plunge because this novel was ah-ma-zing!

16th century Constantinople and Venice explode off the pages in The Venetian Bargain! You see the sights and smell the smells of these two exotic locales vividly under Fiorato's skillfull pen. The ambience and mood of the time feels spot on and it's easy to get lost in the descriptions.

The main themes of the novel are the Plague and the various medical practices that existed, both based on either superstition or science, and the religious differences between the Turks and Christians. It's clearly evident to the reader that the author's done her research. But it's not just the historical aspects that make this book so hard to put down, it's Fiorato's writing style. I was immediately drawn in by her strong and polished voice and held captivated until the end.

Um, and can we talk about the cover? Hello, gorgeous! I need that dress pronto (and if the figure comes with it, so much the better)! It suits the book perfectly and I can totally believe that could be Feyra.

The Venetian Bargain is one of those books that will make you want to hide away behind a locked door, ignore the cries of your husband and kids, and the hundreds of emails waiting a response, and the call of dirty dishes, and just READ. Do yourself a favor and pick this up, you can thank me later!

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### **Sarah says**

Oh what a wonderful introduction to Marina Fiorato! I especially enjoyed her attention to historical detail and how vibrant her settings were. The canals of Renaissance Venice, the crowded bazaars of old Constantinople, the opulence of its Sultan's harem halls, and the sad dorm rooms of plague hospitals all come to incredible life in this woman's hands. I'd rank her right up there with such greats as Stephanie Thornton and Elizabeth Chadwick. She makes her readers experience the world, not just read about it.

I was also intrigued at how vivid the characters were. Everyone had their attributes and sins, their perks and their tragedies. I found our two main leads especially intriguing. Annibale's at times very clinical view of his patients hides a deep care he also has towards them and their care. Feyra tried to find her way in this new world through many avenues until finding a new home and love on the hospital island. I liked how these two played off each other, discussing their different medical expertise areas and working together ultimately to care for their patients. I think they find something in each other that settles them into this new life and into the future.

The overall story will blow you out of the water. Not only the historical background story with the struggle between Venice and the Turks (of which the only knowledge I had was from the movie *Dangerous Beauty*), but the story of a woman trying to warn this new city of impending future dangers all the while trying to stay hidden from her possible persecution. Renaissance Venice was not known for its tolerance... There's also a thread about building a glorious tribute to heaven to stave off God's plague, the story of two individuals trying to find common ground and save lives, the particulars of the medical field during the Renaissance as it transitioned from the superstition of the Middle Ages to the beginnings of modern thought.... There's just so much here that the reader will be kept spellbound for a long time.

This book has it all: fantastic characters, relationships that you'll be invested in, historical setting details that suck you into the story, and different story threads that interweave into a fantastic whole. This has become one of my favorite books of the year, and it's not hard to see why. High, highly recommended!

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