

Venetian Born



Andy Burtis

Venetian Born is a story about an unlikely friendship between a country boy and city boy, Piero and Giulio, both Alberti, whose voices cry out from an age long ago. It is 1620 and the Republic of Venice is on the verge of war with Hapsburg Spain and Austria. They embody loyalty, duty, and grit in a troubled time that tests them at every turn.

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Aside from the dates of events, court records, signed contracts, archival evidence to the lives of these two Alberti families and many other families in this book, my portrayal of these people in these circumstances is fictitious.

For further information concerning the historical significance and particular application of early modern history to our present time, please contact me at my website below. There, you will find the prequel, 'Age of Lepanto,' to this, my first book of my trilogy, 'Venice, East and West.' Also at my website is a full **bibliography** of my sources and a much more complete lexicon of **Venetian Terminology** than I included in the **back of this book**.

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Main Points of View for ‘Venetian Born’

Piero Cesare Alberti: adopted son of adoptive parents Fiamo and Teresa Rubino, and natural grandson of Cecco

Giulio Cesare Alberti: son of Andrea and Veronica Alberti

Pasquale Alberti: favorite son of Cecco, favorite uncle of Piero

Evangelina Giustinian di Badoer, Giulio’s girlfriend

Supporting Characters

* indicates point of view

*Anzcha, Swiss governess to Giulio’s family, sister of Teresa

*Andrea and Veronica Alberti, Giulio’s parents, *cittadini* of Venice

Francesco Alberti, Giulio’s troublesome older brother

Isabetta Alberti, Giulio’s angelic sister

*Cecco Alberti, owner of osteria in Malamocco

Cecco’s sons Lorenzo, Lionello, Michiel, Dovo, & *Giobbo

Iseppo, Baker and Capo of Malamocco’s town council

Evangelina’s father, Podesta Badoer of Malamocco 1620-1621

Carlo, Piero’s difficult fisherman friend at Malamocco

Father Leo, friendly parish priest of Malamocco

Romano, Giulio’s street-savvy family gondolier

Antonio, Giulio’s cousin and fellow student at the Ducal Chancellery

‘Ji,’ Giulio and Piero’s young Turkish friend at the Fondaco dei Turchi in Venice

Girolamo Alberti, Giulio’s uncle who manages Fondaco dei Turchi and mentors Giulio in the eastern trade

Gasparo Alberti, Giulio’s great uncle, father of Girolamo, and Segretario alla Voce to the Venetian Great Council

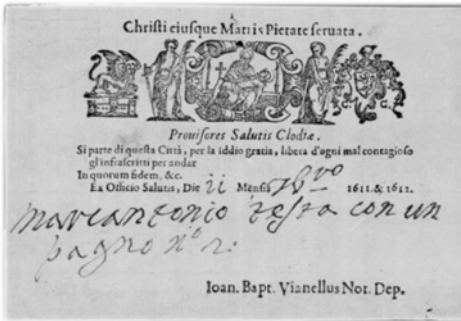
Vice Chancellor Padovan, Antonio’s uncle

Milander, Dutch mercenary fighting for Venice

Dr. Anzeliari: doctor, music *aficionado* and partner of Giulio’s father in the summer villa *Mirasol* the related families share

*Sier Palpigna, Promoter of the *Ponte dei Pugni* of Venice

CHAPTER 1 – PRETENDER



It was hot. The incoming Podesta of the Venetian Lido, Augusto Falier, was losing his patience. And the outgoing governor had shown him what records he needed to see. So Falier cut short the man's perfunctory *relatione* of his term in

office. "You have obviously paid your due diligence in the essentials like checking for health papers on foreign ships. But what of my clear and present duty to mitigate the flow of this pestilence coming from our mainland *terraferma*? There must be a local here in Malamocco acquainted with the smaller boats entering our lagoon."

"Yes, there is. A certain Cecco Alberti, the innkeeper. Knows everyone in the Dogado. Avoids impropriety at all costs. Someone who will close the *osteria* in a second if so ordered. Indeed, he has already turned a few away on his own already. No *fedi di sanita*, no food, no lodging." The old man showed him the health pass that a visiting Podesta of Chioggia had accidentally left at Cecco's on his way back there from Venezia. It was dated 1611.

As Falier regarded the stamped ticket on the desk, his sweaty fingers rubbed under the long sleeves of the black robe worn by the upper classes called the *vesta*. "This is helpful. Now please, would you be so kind as to show me where this *osteria* is before you depart?"

"Certainly, Signore Falier, come with me. Our town is small, and his is the only *osteria* here. Oh, how I look forward to my next post at Corfu. The farther away the better from this city so fearful of plague! The last one in 1575-77 took a third of the population, I hear."

As they ambled slowly down the long *sala di portego* that served all such palaces as a second-story reception hall, Falier drew the man out further. "Now, is this the same Cecco who signed the deed of property you showed me earlier? The property that the Doge Mocenigo bequeathed to his young caretaker, Fiamo Rubino?"

“Yes, one and the same. As Fiamo’s legal guardian.”

Falier’s rubbing fingers slipped as he considered just how close Fiamo and Cecco might be. Too close, perhaps, for comfort.

“Quite a redemption for the Doge,” the Podesta continued. “This atonement to the boy—to make up for how badly one of the Doge’s sons treated him. The unfortunate incident occurred three years before the plague, actually. From what Cecco’s wife told me, it seems the Doge’s errant son brought his friends to his family’s summer place on a lark—a property that sits a good ways down the Lido. After harassing the boy, who was filling in for his father as caretaker, it seems this son wandered down the beach towards town here before he accidentally shot Cecco’s only daughter on the way. It occurred during the battle of Lepanto. Do you remember that? The Holy League’s defeat of the Ottoman armada?”

“How did the mother come to tell you all this history?”

“It was just last week that she summoned me to her deathbed to make sure of certain legalities in her will. It was shortly after that matter was resolved that she broke down while recounting what happened. The woman and her daughter were out picking berries to take to this Fiamo, who was about the daughter’s age of thirteen. The son of the old Doge was drunk by the time he disembarked at the property, the boy testified three years after, and his friends drunk too—all dressed as Turks and brandishing firearms. It was when the Doge’s son thought they were being fired upon by locals out hunting rabbits that he shot back through some bushes in self-defense and killed the daughter.”

“Sounds like that to me.”

“Well, not to the family or to the Malamochi here. It broke the girl’s mother’s heart, and doubly so to see the effect on her husband, Cecco, who turned to drink after discovering such a thing upon returning from Lepanto. Especially after watching his friend, Fiamo’s father, taking a spear to the back to save the life of Sebastian Venier, the commander of the Venetian fleet. What made it even worse was that the jury acquitted the Doge’s son.”

“Did the boy not have a mother?”

Stopping at the window, the outgoing Podesta shook his head. “It seems not. And to think the Doge’s son had threatened to dismiss Fiamo before this happened, is it not truly a wonder to consider God’s hand in this, for a boy left alone in the world?”

“Trite, perhaps, this last-minute attempt at redemption, though touching, as you say. Certainly a reckless, devastating lark for the son,” Falier added as sympathetically as he could. Arriving at the window, Falier sighed to feel the fierce heat penetrating the thick panes of glass. No wonder the old man was eager to get to Corfu. And knowing how close Cecco and Fiamo were, Falier now half-wished he was going too. For it would not be easy serving notice of the subpoenas about to be issued to Fiamo and another Malamochi man. Or even informing the outgoing Podesta first. But a duty, nevertheless. At least according to his patron who got him elected to this God-forsaken backwater post. But first, he had to ask, “Does this Cecco have a son named Lionello?”

“Oh yes, who happens to be especially close to Fiamo.”

Falier’s heart sank. But he had to say it. “Both Lionello and Fiamo will soon be tried for setting fire to the Doge’s Palace during that trial you mentioned.”

The old Podesta just laughed. “But the statute of limitations—”

Falier cut him off. “New charges have come to light—it so happens, especially with the fire’s extensive destruction. Depositions claim that Fiamo was invited by the Doge’s *capocuocco* to visit him during that trial. For being a good understudy to the master cook at the Doge’s place in summers. And Lionello went down to the kitchen with him. Where it started.”

“But I am sure the man is dead by now. Almost forty years—”

“Not the witnesses. They say the fire was lit during a recess after it became apparent to the gallery stocked with Cecco’s friends and sons that the Doge’s son was to be acquitted of murdering the girl. Now, should I expect a violent reaction from this Cecco, do you think? Do I need your help?” He rubbed the sweat off his neck.

“No, on both accounts. Cecco is most civil, if anything. This news will crush the whole family, however, if true. It just doesn’t sound plausible. Fiamo pays his taxes, volunteers for civic events and on behalf of the *ortolani*’s co-operative gathers the produce of the island to be sold at the Rialto with little compensation. All while caring for his wife, who is not well. But before you broach this expected arraignment to Cecco, make sure to secure his commitment to help you throughout this pestilence. For there are many boats coming from the mainland all the time. He will know just where to

deploy your dragnet. Everything in the Dogado is discussed at his place—merchants, captains, Venetian officials—everything settled.”

Yet, for all the man’s talk about traffic, Falier saw not one sign of life from their window facing the square, unpaved *campo* and church on the other side. Just an undulating wave of heat climbing up the flagpole. And for a second, he wondered if it was worth his trouble to do that same Doge’s errant son’s bidding in return for stuffing the ballot urn to get him at least some work after being imprisoned. But alas, here he was, carrying out what was now an old self-possessed son’s vendetta to get that Fiamo outed and his property back. Despite him being as wealthy from inheritance as sin.

“So, are the people here as hostile to our government as the natives in our Mediterranean colonies are known to be? Would I expect an uprising?” he asked the man.

“Oh no. Perhaps it flares up between the fishermen and farmers, or when justice seemed not to have been served in the case of Cecco’s daughter.” The outgoing Podesta hesitated. “But there is one old rooster named Iseppo, the town *capi*. Don’t get on his bad side or he will turn his council on you. Excepting him, the people here are mostly humble. Fishermen, mostly, in town, otherwise *ortolani*, some of whom divide their time between farming and work at the Arsenale.”

Falier sniggered. “Well, I probably should take your advice. Although I can’t help but think Cecco is not as civil as you think, at least according to the pilot of the city’s lagoon *traghetti di viago* I came on. Does this Cecco really roam the coast at night, as the pilot told me?”

“Eccentric, yes. But understandable for someone who witnessed his family wiped out from an Ottoman raid when a boy. And most of us patricians would certainly not give up our class to marry a commoner as he did, would we?”

When Falier said nothing, the old man begged his leave. “Well, I must not miss the next *traghetti*, so good luck to you, signore.”

What should he do now, Falier wondered? Change the deed or...

His wide-brimmed cane hat soaked with sweat by the time he crossed the barren *campo* to the Osteria Alberti, he paused at the door to observe the cartouche above it displaying an ‘AA’ and a crest of some ugly bird. Gathering his courage, he then stepped into a surprisingly different world than the dusty *campo* and deserted main

street shooting off it. For in front of him was a very crowded, noisy and expansive room. Inquiring after Cecco, he watched a servant boy scale the stairs about mid-room to his right, obviously to fetch him.

So he waited, his eyes scanning the room for the beer and wine casks, which he found near the left-hand corner of the room past the hearth. A little refreshment was just what he needed to bolster his spirits. The patrons were certainly busy enough tapping them. Was it a private reception, he wondered? Surely it was, he determined, when he saw platters of food being brought to the tables through the swinging door in the far corner to his right, past the stairs. But where was Cecco?

Keeping his eyes on the staircase, he waited, until he saw a man gesturing him over to his table half-way between the stairs and the hearth, a big round one. "Come over here," the man called out, "or you'll die of thirst waiting for the old cock who owns this place!"

He adjudged the old man to be Iseppo the *capo* as he approached—the reptilian-looking one now standing up. And it was not long after introductions were made to each man in his council, that Falier realized that he had fallen into a pair of hands capable of doing anything.

With a broad sweep of his blue-veined hand, Iseppo introduced him to everyone as if at auction. "Our new Podesta, Augusto Falier!"

The osteria went quiet. Iseppo poured a glass for him from a carafe. "A toast, everyone," the *capo* announced. "New beginnings!"

Falier took a drink along with everyone else, but such a dreary smattering of applause greeted his ears that he couldn't even reply. His countenance melting, he lowered the drink Iseppo had handed him to the table, wanting nothing more than to sit down and disappear. He had been used poorly indeed by the sharp-chinned lizard who now called for an extra chair that never came for the lack of empty ones available.

It was then he saw a tall man in a white shirt under an open dark frock walking slowly down the stairs, a look of great anguish in his eyes. Atop his eyes were white bushy eyebrows, and atop his forehead the unruliest shock of white hair he had ever seen.

The man, who looked even older than the auctioneer, walked over to him directly, introduced himself as Cecco, and thanked him for coming. He would apprise him of the *peste* soon, he promised at his question, all the while gently drawing him by the elbow to the

door. *Was he about to be shown out of this humorless place?* Falier asked himself. *The height of indignity!*

But at the door Cecco stopped, leaned over and whispered in his ear. "My wife died last night, Sier Falier. I am very sorry, but the burial is about to take place." He shrugged a little as they made room for two sweat-soaked young men to enter, who told Cecco the site was ready. In no time a line formed to the door. Falier bowed to each of the first ones who went out, until a slightly crippled woman stopped in her tracks. She stared at him like she had seen a ghost. It sent chills through his spine to recognize who she was.

Her head turned slightly towards a short, stocky red-going-on-grey-headed man by her side. Placing a bent hand lightly on his shoulder she nodded in his direction, telling the man who he was. She mumbled some words he couldn't make out but one, but that one word alone stopped the whole procession cold and sent his heart racing—"Anzcha."

Everyone in the room was abuzz, some cussing his name; some seemingly ready to throw him out of the place. It was the stocky man who intervened on his behalf to gently draw him away from the line of angry people to a window with a view of the campo and the palazzo from whence he had come.

Everything, he realized, was over for him in this town, and that is exactly what the man now addressed. "Are you the one who married my wife's sister out of the Zitelle?"

Unable to admit it for fear of being torn limb from limb by the people in line at so much as a nod from this man, he stayed quiet.

"Speak," the man quietly demanded, his soft, but intent blue eyes set in a rough and weather-worn face. "I am Fiamo Rubino, and I need to know if it was my wife's sister you threw to the dogs you called friends—to have their way with her when she tried to run away after you beat her—*many times*. That is not something a civilized husband does, now, is it?"

Backing up towards the corner, Falier could only nod his head up, down and sideways—certain that Cecco's wife would not be the only one buried this miserable day.

"Then I suggest you leave this town and never come back."

But he did not leave Malamocco at once, for he felt compuncted to do the Doge's son's bidding, at the very least, before he left. So,

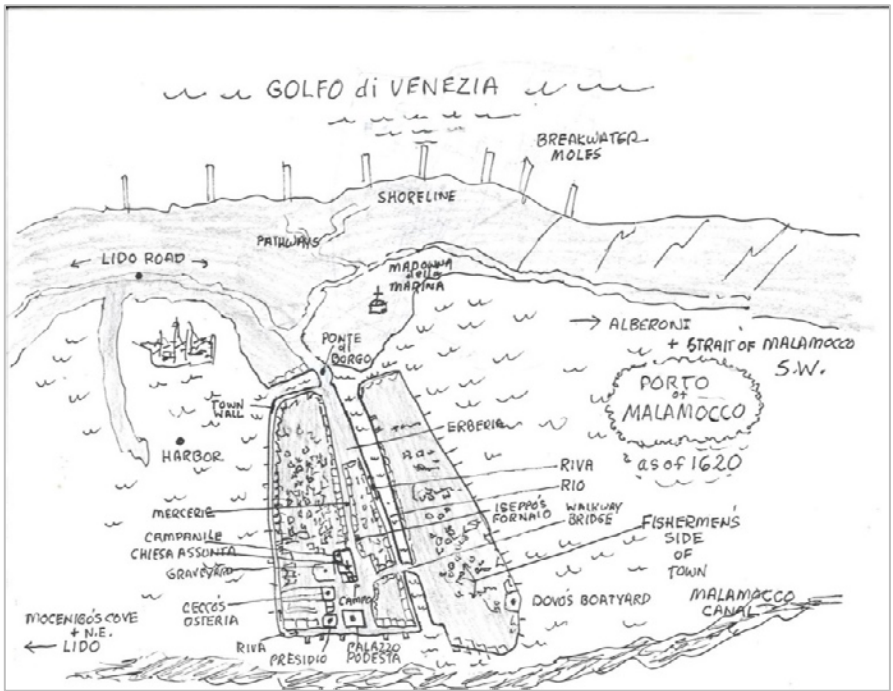
huffing from the walk upstairs to the office, he made his change to a certain clause in Fiamo's addended deed. Ironically, his still-shaking hand made his writing a perfect match to the final clause stipulating that no taxes would have to be paid on the *cason*, itself, should Fiamo Rubino use it, unless it was either rented out or the caretaker's house and the whole property sold. He held it up to the light and read his handiwork out loud. "*The duration of said clause to terminate at the end of ten years*"—and not one smudge from his sweaty fingers! It sounded good, he was thinking, when two men walked in.

"Sounds generous, doesn't it, Lionello?" the man Fiamo said.

"Let me have a look," the man Lionello replied, whisking it out of his shaking hand. Falier protested and started to rise when Fiamo's hand came down like a vice on his shoulder. Lionello whistled after reading it. "The Podesta will love this, Fiamo. Make holding up the *traghetto* well worth his while. A shame our pretender didn't even blow it dry yet. How very generous of him not to make it *five* years and a small fortune to pay in back taxes. Something tells me that our friend will have no second thoughts about coming back now. Good of the Podesta to let us know our feet were soon to be held to the fire."

"Bad for this one," replied Fiamo, "when the Lords of the Night in Venezia see this. Now...*here*, let me give the last word a good smear with my thumb and make my mark." Falier felt the mark imprinted on his forehead. "You can get up now, Falier," his captor, Fiamo Rubino, told him. "The Podesta won't hold up the *traghetto* forever."

"Or the services for mother," replied the man Lionello with a chuckle. "The crabby old *piovan* wasn't too pleased with the delay, but I'm sure mother was."



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