



Lucifer's Shadow

David Hewson



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Delta Trade Paperbacks

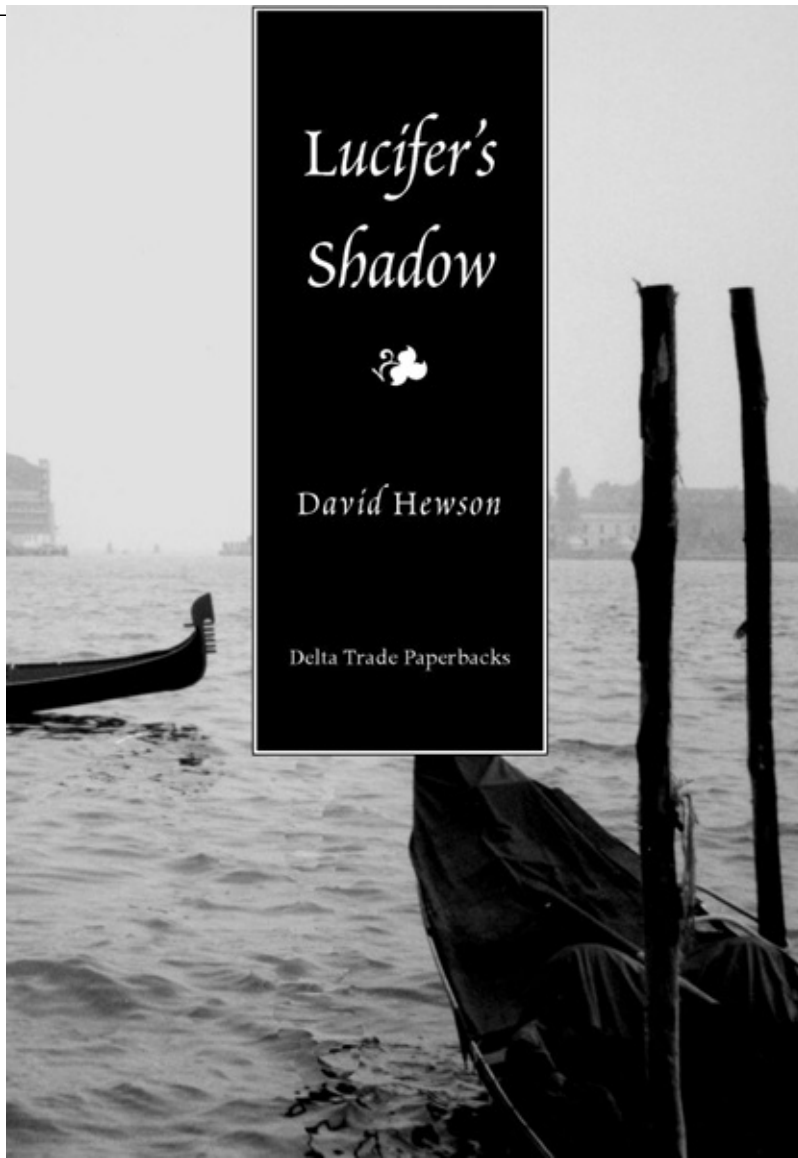


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For Helen, Catherine, and Thomas, whose music led me here

Passionate acclaim for David Hewson's novels

Lucifer's Shadow

“Richly enjoyable . . . Sophisticated and beguiling entertainment.” —*Sunday Times* (UK)

“Venice is painted beautifully, both then and now, and this would be a splendid book to read after you have taken the evening air in the Piazza San Marco, or when gliding down the Grand Canal.”

—*London Times*

“An unusual but beautifully-written interwoven twin story of scams, deception and intrigue in the world of music, of all places, set 250 years apart in Venice.” —*Irish News*

“Entertaining [and] fun.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“This intelligent and highly detailed thriller rivals Pérez-Reverte's *The Flanders Panel* in historical intricacy, complexity of motive, and multileveled storytelling. Masterfully plotted . . . Prepare for a devilish ride in which beauty masks wickedness, and righteousness is relative.” —*Booklist* (starred review)

“Hewson spins a compelling tale while drawing a captivating portrait of Venice that will send readers searching for their passports.” —*Mystery Lovers Bookstore News*

A Season for the Dead

“*A Season for the Dead*, like *The Da Vinci Code*, is a thriller that takes an unflattering look at the Catholic Church, but is better written and more sophisticated than Dan Brown's phenomenal bestseller. . . . The books differ, too, in that Hewson, far more than Brown or most thriller writers, has a serious concern for character. . . . Intelligent entertainment.” —*Washington Post*

“Hewson's suspenseful, fascinating mystery has an appealing detective and many complex characters on both sides of the law. Twisting and turning through Italian history and art, Nic Costa's first case gives the serial murder mystery a new look.” —*Dallas Morning News*

“Hewson's absorbing series debut features a memorable cast of fully human characters, imagines the distorted mind of a serial killer and takes a chilling glimpse into the Vatican's less-than-godly dealings with the secular world.” —*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“A complicated and engrossing mystery so compelling that it begs for a one-night reading.”

—*Chattanooga Times Free Press*

“Boasts finely researched Vatican locations, delves into political maneuvering in the church hierarchy and has a connection to religious art . . . Fast-moving, smart and filled with gruesome killings and

“Hewson has very effectively developed his own version of the serial killer. . . . The action is well paced, the plot nicely twisted, the characters often chameleon-like, and the setting is definitely fascinating for many readers. . . . A well written mystery with some real surprises.” — *Deadly Pleasures*

“A slam-bang beginning with a shoot-out in the Vatican Library, a wonderful tour of Rome, a nifty Italian policeman with a father famous for his Communist activism, corruption or at least conspiracy in the Church, and a series of gruesome crimes seemingly linked to saints and perhaps to Caravaggio get this one rolling. . . . A grand series start for Italian cop Nic Costa.” —*Booknews from The Poisoned Pen*

“The first in a promising Italian crime series set in Rome . . . Hewson’s way with the Roman milieu as cutting-edge as his adroit narrative.” — *Publishing News (UK)*

“An oddball detective mistrusted by his bosses, a beautiful woman, the elegant backdrop of Rome and sinister goings-on in the Vatican all add up to a new spin on the serial killer tale. . . . All of this works not simply because of the frenetic plot but because Hewson has two beguiling, fascinating characters to hold our interest. . . . [He] has a lightness of touch, an eye for the macabre and an understanding that you can’t beat the old fatal attraction between an all-too-human cop and a beautiful woman.” — *Sunday Mercury (UK)*

“History and travel fans will embrace this book, but it doesn’t let lovers of suspense and political intrigue down either. . . . [Hewson’s] descriptions of Rome in August are so real you can see St. Peter’s Square shimmering in the heat, and the narrow, winding lanes of the old city bring history to life. It may be too gritty a depiction of the underbelly of humanity to suit some sensitive souls, but I’m very keen to read his next novel.” — *Cape Times (South Africa)*

“Dark and complex . . . astonishing . . . immerse yourself in this.” —*Crime Time (UK)*

“A delicious and compelling view of the public art of Rome and the private intrigues of the Vatican.” —*Library Journal*

“Hewson’s extremely intelligent novels at once viscerally entertain and intellectually challenge. . . . Breathtaking . . . The result is a tale that is a dark delight, a story that one is compelled to read at one sitting while simultaneously wishing it will never end.” — Bookreporter.com

The Villa of Mysteries

“A novel to savour—imagine the deceptive relaxed atmosphere of Donna Leon’s Brunetti novels mixed with the darkness of Rankin’s Rebus sequence. Excellent. Four stars.” —*Ink Magazine (UK)*

“Hewson’s strong suit is his ability to blend ancient and modern Rome, a feat that happens naturally when you’re standing at the edge of the Janiculum, but is difficult otherwise. Hewson’s plot, woven with ancient lore, has just the right amount of information and deduction. . . . This is a terrific novel by a fine emerging British talent.” — *Toronto Globe and Mail*

“A beautifully structured and absorbing thriller. The characters . . . polish up as individuals, freshly drawn. The city of Rome, her cops, bureaucrats and criminals, shine hard and clear as sunlight bouncing off the Trevi fountain. But they’re a lot less pretty. And this is tasty stuff.” — *Crime Time* (UK)

“A riveting tale of revenge brought to life by sharp characterization and powerful dynamics.” — *The Good Book Guide* (UK)

“A great book, a great read, edge of the seat stuff—thoroughly recommended.” — *Murder and Mayhem Book Club* (UK)

“A genuine page-turner that you never want to end. Hewson is brilliant at conveying mood and atmosphere and wraps the reader in the tense and terrifying pursuit every step of the way. If you missed the first book, *A Season for the Dead*, buy them both and savour every twist and turn.” — *Newbury News* (UK)





San Michele

HE REMEMBERED TO WEAR BLACK. THE CHEAP, THIN suit from Standa. Shiny office shoes. A pair of fake Ray-Ban Predators stolen from some Japanese tourist straight off the coach at Piazza Roma.

Rizzo lit a cigarette and waited by the gatehouse at San Michele. It was the first Sunday in July. The lagoon was entering summer, the change marked by the chittering of swallows above his head and the torpid heat rising from the water. A spirited breeze rippled the cypresses that dotted the cemetery like exclamation marks. In the shade of an alcove to his right, discreetly hidden, was an ordered stack of empty pine coffins. Rizzo watched something move in a beam of sunlight catching the corner of the nearest casket. A small lizard, dots running down its spine, dashed into the patch of gold, paused, then scurried back into the cracked brickwork.

Some job, Rizzo thought. Getting paid for checking up on a corpse.

The cemetery supervisor came out of his office and stared at the cigarette until Rizzo stamped it out. The man was short and fat, sweating in his bright white cotton shirt. He looked about forty, with a thick head of greasy hair and a weedy moustache like a comb snapped in half then stuck above a pair of fleshy lips.

“You got the papers?”

Rizzo nodded and tried to offer him half a smile. The supervisor wore a sour look, as if he suspected something was wrong. Rizzo was twenty-five but could pass for thirty dressed like this. Still, he guessed he looked a little young to be claiming possession of some stray cadaver, as if it were luggage left to be retrieved from a locker at the station.

He pulled out the documents the Englishman had given him that morning in the big, palatial apartment behind the Guggenheim Gallery. Massiter said they'd work. They'd cost enough.

“You're a relative?” the supervisor asked, staring at the lines of fine type on the page.

“Cousin,” Rizzo replied.

“No other family?”

“All gone.”

“Huh.” The man folded up the papers and stuffed them in his pocket. “You could have waited another four weeks, you know. Ten years, they get. To the day. Seen plenty of people coming here late. Not seen many turn up early.”

“Commitments.”

The supervisor grimaced. “Sure. The dead got to fit themselves in to your calendar. Not the other way round. Still...” He favoured Rizzo with a professional glance that might have harboured a grain of sympathy in it. “Least you’re here. You’d be amazed how many of those poor things just never got claimed at all. Run up their decade in the ground and then we just take ’em to the public ossuary. No choice, you see. No room.”

Everyone in Venice knew the score, Rizzo thought. If you wanted to be buried in San Michele, you had to follow the rules. The little island that sat between Murano and the northern shore of the city was full. The big names the tourists came to see could lie secure in their graves. Everyone else was on a temporary permit that lasted precisely ten years. Once the lease on that little plot of ground ran out it was up to the relatives to take the bones elsewhere or leave the city to do the job for them.

The Englishman knew all about it too. For reasons Rizzo did not wish to know, he had fixed the disinterment papers early so he was the first to know what was in the box. Maybe there was someone else interested in this rotting corpse, someone who would stick to the ten-year deadline. Maybe not. Rizzo still didn’t see the point. Was this to check there really was a body inside the casket? That had to be it. In truth, he didn’t care. If the guy was willing to pay him two million lire just to flutter a couple of pages of forged paperwork around, he was more than happy. It made a change from lifting wallets in the crowds milling around San Marco.

“We have ways of doing this,” the man said. “We like to do things nice and proper.”

Rizzo followed him, past the tidy collection of shiny new coffins, out into the beating sun. They walked through the first section of the cemetery, where the dead had long-term residency, then on to an outlying area used for the relentless cycle of temporary burials. Green tarpaulins marked the area where the current crop of bodies was being harvested. Each tiny headstone carried a photograph of young and old, frozen in a moment of time, looking at the camera as if they believed they would never die at all. They stopped by *Recinto 1, Campo B*, amid a fragrant ocean of flowers. The supervisor pointed to the headstone. On it was her name, reversed like all those in the cemetery: *Gianni Susanna*. Just turned eighteen when she died. The grave was empty, the earth freshly dug.

Her portrait sat in an oval frame attached to the marble headstone. Rizzo couldn’t take his eyes off it. Susanna Gianni was as beautiful a girl as any he’d ever seen. The photograph must have been taken outside, on a sunny day, perhaps close to the time of her death. She didn’t appear sick. She wore a purple T-shirt. Her long, dark hair fell to her shoulders. Her face and neck were tanned, her mouth set in a natural, open smile. She looked like a kid about to graduate from university, innocent, but with a knowing expression in her gaze that said she’d been places, she knew a few tricks too. Rizzo closed his eyes behind the dark glasses and tried to still his thoughts. It was crazy, he knew, but he could feel himself hardening at the sight of this unknown girl who had died, of what he couldn’t begin to guess, almost a decade before.

“You want the headstone?” The supervisor’s voice cut through this sudden, half-scary, half-delicious reverie. “If you want it, you can take it away with the casket. I guess you organised a boat, huh?”

Rizzo didn't answer the questions. He pushed his hands deep into the pockets of his cheap jacket and held them in front of him, wondering if the man had noticed.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Send the boatmen round. They know where to come."

"Where is she?" Rizzo repeated. The Englishman had been specific about what he wanted.

"We got a place." The supervisor said this with a sigh, as if he knew what was coming next.

"Show me."

Without a word, the man turned and headed for a deserted corner in the northern part of the cemetery. One of the big ferries destined for Burano and Torcello passed on the right. Gulls hung in the choppy air. A scattering of figures moved through the headstones, some with bouquets in their hands. Rizzo had been here only once before, with an old girlfriend, going to see her grandmama. The place spooked him. When he went, he wanted to go out in a puff of flame, a sudden fire inside the municipal crematorium on the mainland. Not lie around beneath the dry San Michele earth, waiting to be dug up a decade later.

They walked to a small, low building with a single tiny window. The supervisor fished a keychain out of his pocket and opened the door. Rizzo took off his sunglasses and followed him inside. Then he waited as the man threw the light switch, waited as his eyes adjusted to the abrupt transition from the piercing sunlight into the dark and then back into the thinner glare of the one fluorescent tube in the ceiling.

The coffin sat on a trestle in the middle of the room. The wood was a lifeless, flat grey colour. It was as if the thing, and what it contained, had been desiccated over the few years it had rested beneath the surface.

"Like I said," the man repeated, "send your men here. They'll know what to do. You don't want to watch. Believe me."

The Englishman had given his instructions.

"Open it."

The supervisor swore softly, folded his arms, and glowered into the dark corner beyond the casket. "No can do," he murmured. "What kind of game are you playing, kid?"

Rizzo reached into his pocket and pulled out two hundred euro notes. Massiter had known the money might be incidentals along the way.

"Listen," he said. "The Giannis are a real close family. Just let me see my sweet little cousin one more time and then I'm on my way, OK?"

“Shit,” the man said, then pocketed the notes and picked up a crowbar leaning against the wall. “You want me to take the lid off? Or do you feel so close to her you want to do that too?”

What Rizzo felt like was a cigarette. The tiny room was airless. A smell, musty and pervasive, was coming from the coffin. “Do it,” he said, and nodded at the casket.

The man grunted, lifted the crowbar, and jammed it beneath the cover of the coffin. He barely looked at what he was doing. He’d popped these things a million times, Rizzo guessed. It was like working in a slaughterhouse or a morgue. After a while you never even thought about what was going on.

The iron worked its way around the wooden box slowly, lifting it just a few centimetres at a time, exposing the bent, rusty nails that held the thing together. The man completed a circle of the casket, then looked at Rizzo one final time.

“You sure about this, kid? A lot of you guys are real brave out there in the light of day, but it doesn’t seem such a good idea when you’re in here and it’s time.”

Rizzo didn’t like being called “kid.” Again he said, “Do it.”

The supervisor carefully eased the bar beneath the cover, then pushed down, levering it open. The wood shattered into two pieces with a sudden, piercing crack. Rizzo jumped, in spite of himself. Dust and particles filled the air. Behind them came a persistent, noisome smell that was identifiably human in origin. Just one look, he thought. That was all the Englishman asked for.

He leaned over and peered into the casket. Her head was in the shadow cast by the corner of the box. The long hair was grey now, grey and fine and dry-looking. It hung down both sides of her skull, some of which some flesh was still attached, like flaps of old brown leather. There was something in the eye sockets. He didn’t want to look too closely. Around what remained of her shoulders were the straps of what must once have been a white shroud.

Rizzo thought he was going to stare at the skull and wonder where that lovely face had disappeared to. The nascent erection was all but gone now. He felt cold in the room. The air swam in front of him. He wouldn’t be surprised if, pretty soon, he threw up. Not through horror and disgust, but from the insidious, choking atmosphere of the place. It was like standing in a cloud of human dust formed by every single being that had passed through the gates of San Michele over the centuries.

But he didn’t look at the skull for long. Her arms were folded over her chest, long arms now reduced to a skeletal skinniness. To his surprise, they enclosed something, an object large enough to run from beneath her chin to the lower part of her body. He stared at it and knew the cemetery supervisor was doing the same. It was so out of place that it took a long time before he finally realised what this shape was. The corpse of Susanna Gianni, whoever she might have been, had been buried clutching an ancient violin case, her arms wrapped lovingly around the thing as if it were an infant.

The Englishman hadn’t said anything about this. He just said to see the bones and then get going. It was a done deal, Rizzo thought, and no one could blame a man if he took a little incidental profit along the way.

~~He reached down, gently pried the grip of the dead arms from the case, then started to slide it out from underneath the cold, dry flesh.~~

The supervisor glowered at him. "You shouldn't be doing that."

Rizzo stopped and sighed. He was tired of this little man. He was tired of this place. Rizzo reached into his pocket and pulled out the small flick blade he took everywhere. Looking at the fat man, he pushed the button on the side, let the thin sliver of blade bite into the musty air, then grabbed him by the collar, watched the terror in his face grow. He thrust the tip into the fleshy underside of the man's left eyelid. The point lifted the flabby skin into a tiny pyramid, pricking through the surface just hard enough for Rizzo to see a tiny bubble of blood there.

"Do what?" he asked calmly. "I didn't do a thing."

The fat man froze and didn't speak. Rizzo reached into the man's jacket pocket, took out a cheap plastic wallet, and looked at the identity card. The caretaker lived in one of the public housing blocks north of him, in the Cannaregio. He could walk it in five minutes.

"Be smart," Rizzo hissed. "Or maybe I come back here and make you bury yourself. Huh?"

The supervisor's eyes had the flat, glazed look of terror. Rizzo pulled his arm away, let go of the man, then went back to the coffin, lifted the dead arms again, and removed the violin case. Using the sleeve of his cheap jacket, he brushed away the dust on the surface and saw her name there on a faded paper label. Then he slipped his fingers through the handle. The case swung solidly beneath his arm. There was something inside, for sure. Maybe it was just rocks. Even crazy people didn't bury the dead with treasure these days.

The fat man cowered in the darkness, peeing himself in all probability, wishing he were home with his equally fat wife, waiting to be fed. Rizzo grimaced, then pulled out another couple of 100,000-lira notes and stuffed them into the man's shirt pocket. "Your lucky day, friend. It's just a little family business. OK?"

The supervisor took out the notes and rustled them. The money gave him back some respect. They were now, in a sense, even. Rizzo could appreciate that. There wasn't enough respect in the world. He put his fake Predators back on his face, turned, and walked outside.

The voice rose up from behind him. "Hey! Where are the boatmen? They got to deal with this now."

Rizzo looked back from the door at the coffin and the squat little man standing next to it, still in the darkness. "What boatmen?"

"For the bones, for God's sake! I thought you brought her up early to take care of things yourself."

"I never said that," Rizzo answered.

"Jesus! So what do I do with them now?"

Rizzo shrugged. His jacket felt too tight. He hated having to buy these cheap things when what he really wanted were those clothes they sold in San Marco: Moschino, Valentino, and Armani.

“Do what you like,” he replied, then looked at the man. Maybe he had pushed it too far. The guy looked ready to burst into tears or maybe pick a fight, even though he knew Rizzo would use the knife in his pocket. It was wrong, Rizzo thought, to let crazy people work in cemeteries. But maybe that was the only kind that took the job.

“Hey,” he said. “Calm down. Keep your mouth shut. Stop looking like a crazy man. You could scare people like that.”

Then he walked briskly out into the cemetery, retracing his steps through *Campo B*, past what had been Susanna Gianni’s grave, not looking at the headstone, because something told him it would be a bad idea to see that picture of her again.

The *vaporetto* from Murano was half-full. He stood in the centre section, open to the air, and noticed how people moved away from him. The violin case stank, even on the deck with the lagoon breeze stiffening to the occasional gust. The boat slowed, then came to a halt. In front of the Fondamente Nuove, where the vessel would dock, some kind of regatta was taking place. A group of racing boats chased each other along the waterfront, cheered on by spectators from the bars behind the jetty. Rizzo cursed them. The violin felt heavy. The smell was getting worse. The *vaporetto* rolled drunkenly on the grey chop of the waves.

Rizzo closed his eyes. When he opened them, he was staring back at the island. Three police launches, sirens flashing, were heading for the jetty. He couldn’t believe his eyes. He couldn’t believe the fat little caretaker could be that stupid.

Still clutching the case, he lurched for the sliding metal bar that blocked the exit way and vomited over the edge, into the greasy, churning waters. The gulls that seemed fixed to the eggshell-blue sky watched him avidly. San Michele swam in the distance, a white-and-green blur between the city and the low, solid outline of Murano. Rizzo glared at the pure white church by the landing where the boat docked. He swore he would never pass through its gate again.

Ascension Day

Mark this moment: Ascension Day, Thursday, May the fifth, in the Year of Our Lord Seventeen Hundred and Thirty-three. Lorenzo Scacchi, a tall and handsome lad of nineteen years and seven months, stands on the broad stone apron of San Giorgio Maggiore gazing across St. Mark's Basin watching the Doge renew his courtship with the ocean. The water is alive with humanity. Gondolas the colour of night scrap for places near the gold-and-scarlet Bucintoro as it makes its stately course past the Rio del Palazzo, on towards the twin columns of San Marco and San Teodoro and the towering pinnacle of the campanile.

There is a tremor in the air here. The Doge, they say, is sick, mulling over a successor to commend to the Grand Council. The Serene Republic stands balanced between splendour and decay. What might save the day? What sublime genius might restore the city's fortunes and send the greasy Turks packing back to the East?

No one knows. But wait! The Bucintoro turns, away from the filigreed façade of the palace, away from the seething waterfront. Slowly, propelled by the forest of glinting, golden oars that prickle from its sides like the legs of some fanciful, jewelled insect, it glides across the Basin, towards the young man standing by the lapping edge of the waves, hands on slim hips, legs apart, face to the water, golden hair ablaze in the sun. The oarsmen heave into it with their backs and race across the channel at full tilt. Then the gorgeous vessel slows respectfully to reach the flat grey island on which the young man waits, and comes to a graceful halt, a vast, majestic token of power above him. Not for an instant does he waver.

"Lorenzo!" cries the Doge in a voice broken with age but still possessed of the majestic authority of his position. "I ask you again, sir. For the love of the Serenissima! For everything our Republic holds dear! Reconsider, I beg you! Lead us out of this darkness and into the light!"

A single cloud crosses the perfect azure sky, and for a moment, none may see the turmoil in the young man's face. Then it is gone, and his smile, kind yet firm, a wise and noble countenance in one so young, is revealed to all.

"Sure thing, boss," he responds in a raw, country brogue, and humbly shrugs his shoulders. The joyous cries of thousands rise up from the lagoon like thunder reversing its customary journey, soaring upwards to the heavens in a raucous clamour. A new Doge is found and soon . . .

There, dear sister. Do I have your attention now? If I have to write these letters like some tuppenny tale hawked around the streets by mendicants and cripples just to keep you reading, then be assured I'll do it. It is now six weeks since we left Treviso, orphaned by a vicious fate. Do not make me feel alone in this world. You are my elder by two long, important years. I need your wisdom. I need your love. One letter, and that complaining largely of indigestion, does not provide the sustenance I crave.

Still, before I bore you, let me return to the narrative! Of the above, you may ignore everything save the beginning. It is indeed Ascension Day, and I did stand beneath the great stone monolith of San Giorgio; for how long I have no idea. It requires a better writer than this one to paint today's picture for you in mere words, so I shan't even try. Venice is a world of wonders, be assured. Even now I turn the mundane corners and find myself in awe when confronted by everyday splendours that beggar the imagination. When the fathers have something to celebrate and decide to push out the boat—oops, sorry about that!—there's nothing else to do but stand and stare. You came here once with Papa, I believe. I never ventured much further than our little town until after that sad day of the funeral. For a straw-chewing farm lad, this is quite some place.

There are men here I wish you could meet. Picture our Uncle Leo up by the water's edge now, a skinny fellow, arms crossed, in plain dress, watching that big barge drift slowly in front of the palace. He looks as if he's seen this spectacle a million times, and nothing might move him again in a new creation. But he is a Venetian, a man of the world, who would never have followed our dear father into such a quiet life as farming. Spectacle runs through his blood like an everyday humour. One should expect nothing less. He will, I believe, be a good guardian, and teach me the intricacies of the publisher's trade so that I may earn an honest living.

By his side is the English gentleman Oliver Delapole, a noble and aristocrat about our uncle's age, perhaps thirty-five, but of an altogether different background and with a little paunch at his elegant, well-attired belly. Mr. Delapole is a moneyed fellow in fine, perhaps overly extravagant clothing. He has a rosy, kindly face marred only by what I take to be a duelling scar, which runs beneath his right eye like a scimitar on its side. Yet I see no sign of a bellicose nature. In truth he possesses an engaging smile and a genial manner that makes every man—and woman (come, we are country folk and should not shy from such matters)—retire from his company smiling.

Of all those comments, remember that one concerning money; it is the most important word you will hear anywhere in this lagoon. Mr. Delapole is Capital personified, and for that reason half the city sticks to his coattails whenever he happens to pass, though he takes the attention in his stride. He came to our house last week and left his hat in the parlour. I raced after, clutching it, out into the campo, hoping to catch him before he reached the Grand Canal and found one of those ruffian gondoliers to take him home. When, out of breath and unable to speak, I reached him, he smiled pleasantly and asked, almost beside himself with laughter, "Why are you chasing me, lad? Am I the only man left in Venice with a little cash?"

Ducats open doors—most any door in the city, to be frank—and Mr. Delapole is a generous bestower of them. Word is he distributes the cash so quickly the money-lenders must make up the gap between his benevolence and the arrival of yet more funds from London. This is no complaint, you understand. With luck, the House of Scacchi will bring to the public several works from new writers and composers, and all at Mr. Delapole's expense. He has already shown some small kindness to Mr. Vivaldi, the famous musical priest at La Pietà, the ramshackle church a little along the waterfront from today's proceedings. Nor has the local artist Canale (known to all as "Canaletto" to distinguish him from his father, who follows a similar trade) been left out of the party. This is a chap who could apparently sniff the scent of silver from several miles. As I compose this, he sits in front of us all, on a great platform of wood poised above the rest of the party, toiling away on a canvas destined for some rich man's wall.

~~Canaletto is an odd fellow, most argumentative and, some wonder, perhaps a fraud too. He uses something called a camera ottica, a device he claims as his own invention. This is hidden from our eyes inside a black fabric tent in which the artist works, dashing outside from time to time to check that the real world is still there. Apparently the device throws an image of the scene through some kind of glass lens onto an interior screen, where it may be traced prior to painting. Out of curiosity I clambered up the sca folding and examined the exterior of the contrivance, getting a sour look and a mouthful of Venetian cussing when he stuck his head out to investigate my clatter.~~

~~“If one more smart-ass tells me I’m cheating, I shall, I swear, punch his miserable lights out!” Canaletto hissed at me by way of warning.~~

~~Undeterred, I peered at the mechanism through the gap in the fabric created by his hand. It seemed most clever. “How can a little science in the aid of art be described as cheating, sir?” I asked honestly. “On that basis, you would surely be accused of trickery if you failed to use the selfsame paints the Romans favoured for their walls?”~~

~~That did the trick. At least I received what I took to be as close to a nod of approval as Mr. Canaletto might own.~~

~~“What you need next,” I added, “is simply some alchemical canvas which recognises the image itself and moulds its atoms to the relevant pigment. Then you’d have no need of the brush at all!”~~

~~I heard a snigger from Mr. Delapole’s manservant, Gobbo, and beat a sensible retreat back down the woodwork! I trust you have found a friend. I have, of sorts. Luigi Gobbo is an ugly chap with whom I believe it or not, the makings of the hump which his surname would suggest. He joined the Englishmen in France some time back, I believe. In all this company, Gobbo is the most down-to-earth of fellows, always ready with a roguish joke and the occasional impious suggestion. The moment he discovered my fate, he took me under his wing, promising to let no Venetian rogue relieve me of my meagre purses. I like the chap, though we are not much similar. Our parents may have spoiled us with our homegrown education. Thinking that Gobbo might have read a little literature, too, I asked him if he was an old relation of the famous Lancelot, and whether he had abandoned a notorious Jew for the service of Mr. Delapole, a man assuredly as amiable as Bassanio himself, if rather more wealthy. Gobbo looked at me as if I were witless or, worse, mocking him. English playwrights did not enter into his education. Still, he has my best interests at heart, and I his. There is amity in the city after all.~~

~~Now to more weighty matters (which are short, so do not yawn and put down the page, please). It has been a week since Manzini last wrote about the estate (and yes, I agree with you, it is wrong that he must deal with me, not you, but that is the law). I hold out no great hopes. Our parents invested heavily in the farm and that precious library we both adored. Had they lived longer, we would all surely have benefited from their generosity. Since the cholera decided otherwise, we must make the best of what we have. So I shall strike a bargain with you, Lucia. Let us be honest with each other in reporting our failings. Let us write truly of those around us. And let us work diligently to make ourselves worthy of the name Scacchi—until some dashing Spanish blade steals yours away, of course!~~

~~I love you, Lucia, my darling sister, and I would trade an eternity of this magnificence for one~~

moment together with our dear parents in that ragged little farmhouse back in the wild meadows
our home. That cannot be, so we must look to the future.

Wait! I see the famed Canaletto scowling down from his perch once more. A little line of f
Dutchmen waddling together like a flock of ducks are attempting to possess his eyrie and steal a pe
at his precious painting. More fools them . . .

“Bloody tourists,” the artist barks, and emits a flurry of arcane curses which none beyon
Cannaregio may understand. “Off with your ugly snouts and your herring-stink breath!”

“Be bold and wave a florin in his face, sirs,” shouts Mr. Delapole, egging them on. “Any m
smells sweet to Canaletto who has coin in his pocket!”

Muttering darkly, our intruders shuffle o f. I suspect our painter friend is somewhat beyond the
means.

While Canaletto was waving his fist at them, he left the door to his mysterious tented palace open.
leapt stealthily onto the woodwork myself and saw, with great amazement, how far this canvas ha
progressed in little more than an hour. This man is no fraud. It will, I think, be a fine painting. O
day, when you have settled enough in Seville to earn the time and money to return to visit your nati
Veneto, I shall, I fancy, take you to see it. We shall measure the way our pains have diminished an
our fortunes increased in the months that have passed since the Bucintoro found its way on
Canaletto’s piece of rough canvas. Here is a wondrous talent, to trap a piece of glorious time
amber, for all the ensuing centuries to witness. All I have to offer are these words, but they com
freely given and from an adoring heart.

A name from the past

GIULIA MORELLI SIFTED THE REPORT SHEETS ON HER desk. Giulia was duty captain on the evening shift. It was hot inside the modern police block by Piazzale Roma, and the work was beginning to bore her. Sometimes she thought of applying for a transfer. Rome, maybe, or Milan. Anywhere she might find some kind of challenge to keep her mind turning.

Then she stared at the pages in front of her and felt the years roll away in an instant. The dead girl's name seemed to yell at her. Giulia Morelli stabbed at the phone and managed to catch the reporting officer. He was changing before coming off shift, and none too keen to hang around the overheated police station. The tone of her voice ensured he would not leave without telling his story.

She listened keenly for five minutes, finding herself increasingly perplexed, then put the phone down, walked to the window, threw it open, and lit a cigarette. Outside, the last commuters were heading for their cars in the vast multi-storey close to the bridge to terra firma and Mestre, where most of them lived. She watched the straggle of figures and thought about what the officer had just told her. It made no sense. Perhaps it did not say anything about the case of Susanna Gianni at all.

They had been called to San Michele by an irate undertaker whose party had arrived on time for the ceremony, only to find the superintendent missing. They finally found the man in a building used for disinterments, apparently in some kind of distress. When the undertaker remonstrated with him, the superintendent turned violent and attacked two of the party before being restrained.

The senior officer called to the incident attempted to interview the cemetery employee, but to little avail. According to the report, the unfortunate event was caused by a sudden loss of temper in the head. The superintendent was cautioned for minor assault, then allowed to go home. The authorities were to be told, but there would be no formal action. Only one unusual detail was noted on the report, and the officer had again confirmed it, though with no further information, when she had spoken to him. In the disinterment room was the coffin of one Susanna Gianni. It had been opened to expose the corpse. And, so it seemed to the officer, something had been removed from the casket. The shape of a long object, perhaps a metre high, was superimposed against the remains of the cadaver.

With the care and foresight she had come to expect of the uniformed branch, the officer had thought this worthy of mention but not of action. Once he had arranged for the superintendent to be taken home by police launch, he had allowed the removal of the casket—and, with it, Susanna Gianni's bones—to continue. It appeared there was no private arrangement. The disposal of the body was carried out that afternoon by the city cemetery service. The box would be ashes by now. What remained of Susanna Gianni—even the girl's name still made the policewoman's blood race—would be strewn among the sea of skeletons which made up the public ossuary on one of the lagoon's small islands.

Giulia Morelli lacked the energy to curse the idiot. She picked up the phone, arranged for a launch

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