

The City of Falling Angels Study Guide

The City of Falling Angels by John Berendt

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Contents

The City of Falling Angels Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1, "An Evening in Venice".....	4
Chapter 2, "Dust & Ashes".....	8
Chapter 3, "At Water Level".....	10
Chapter 4, "Sleepwalking".....	11
Chapter 5, "Slow Burn".....	13
Chapter 6, "The Rat Man of Treviso".....	14
Chapter 7, "Glass Warfare".....	16
Chapter 8, "Expatriates: The First Family".....	18
Chapter 9, "The Last Canto".....	21
Chapter 10, "For a Couple of Bucks".....	24
Chapter 11, "Opera Buffa".....	26
Chapter 12, "Beware of Falling Angels".....	28
Chapter 13, "The Man Who Loved Others".....	30
Chapter 14, "The Inferno Revisited".....	31
Chapter 15, "Open House".....	32
Characters.....	33
Objects/Places.....	36
Themes.....	38
Style.....	39
Quotes.....	41
Topics for Discussion.....	42



Plot Summary

John Berendt arrives in Venice three days after a terrible fire has destroyed the historic Fenice. He acknowledges that his arrival during this time is purely coincidental, as he had planned the trip months ago. He had wished to visit Venice during the off-season for tourists because he wanted to capture the essence of Venice; an essence, according to him, that lies within the Venetians. After his arrival, Berendt is intrigued by the fire and by the investigation into the fire. He decides to take up residence in Venice for a few months to write a book on the city of Venice and the Venetians. Berendt rents an apartment from Peter and Rose Lauritzen, who live upstairs from his apartment. They are quick to tell him the history of the Fenice, as well as their theory on what really happened. Rose also shares with Berendt how to get the resident discount. She explains to him that all tourists are overcharged or otherwise taken advantage of. She shares the secrets of where he should make himself known in order to be charged the same amount as a citizen of Venice rather than as a tourist.

During the course of Berendt's residence, he meets several people, famous and otherwise. He becomes friends with Count Girolamo Marcello who shares his theories with just about anyone who will listen. Berendt also becomes friends with a painter, Ludovico de Luigi, with whom he spends a lot of time while in Venice. In addition to making friends, Berendt also takes up the task of interviewing several important people. The topic of conversation during most of Berendt's interviews is the Fenice fire, although, he does discuss other things: Ezra Pound's affair, Philip and Jane Ryland, and the Seguso family dispute.

After the first investigation is done, the fire is ruled accidental. However, later on in the book, the fire is investigated again and this time is ruled arson. Berendt is surprised at the ruling and is chastised by Ludovico. Berendt shares the details of the trial of the two electricians charged with the arson: Enrico Carella and Massimiliano Marchetti. Berendt meets with the prosecutor, Felice Casson to discuss the theory behind the charges and gets a full in-depth look into Casson's mind. The two electricians are found guilty and sentenced to six and seven years in prison. Marchetti surrenders himself while Carella is nowhere to be found. During all of the trial, the Fenice is being rebuilt. The original company that is hired to do the reconstruction is forced to stop work two weeks into the job. Another company takes over, but cannot begin work until the dispute is settled. Finally, the Fenice is unveiled and the story comes to a close. Berendt does not leave any open holes though; he fills the reader in on what happened in every event he discusses.



Chapter 1, "An Evening in Venice"

Chapter 1, "An Evening in Venice" Summary

In chapter 1, John Berendt, the main character and author, arrives in Venice three days after the fire has ruined the Fenice, a historic opera house. His arrival in Venice is purely coincidence as the trip was planned months before the fire. He is discussing the fire with the taxi driver who is driving him into Venice. The reader discovers that there are two Venices; the one in which the tourists inhabit and the one inhabited by the true citizens, the Venetians. Upon his arrival, he notes that the tourist part of Venice is pretty much shut down. Hotels are closed, shops are empty, and gondolas are tethered to poles.

The other Venice is going about its daily business. However, the mood is not as lively as usual, but is instead subdued. The Venetians are in a daze over the fire. Berendt notes that he eventually hears so many details about the fire that it is as if he actually witnessed the event.

The readers are introduced to the Seguso family in chapter 1. On Monday evening, January 29, 1996, the Seguso family is sitting down to dinner. Signore Seguso is described as an elderly man: a glassworker, and a hard worker. The Seguso family lives on the third floor of an old house in the center of Venice. Signora Seguso comments on the foggy weather as she closes the curtains while the family sits down to dinner. Signore Seguso comments back that the weather was perfectly clear a few minutes ago and that the fog must have come in rather quickly. As Signora Seguso continues to lower the curtains, she sees two flashes. The first flash she mistakes as lightning, but after she sees the second flash, she knows that it is fire. She calls out for Signore Seguso, screaming to him that the Fenice is on fire. Signore Seguso quickly runs to the window to investigate Signora Seguso's claims. After witnessing the sight for himself, he quickly retreats to the bedroom window where he can get a better view of the Fenice.

Meanwhile, downstairs, Signora Seguso is trying to contact the fire company, but to no avail. When she is unable to reach the police as well, she starts panicking. She calls upstairs to find out the status of her son Gino and his family. Assured that Gino and his family are safe, she heads upstairs to see Signore Seguso. Signora Seguso tells Signore that she has heard from the police and that the fire company has already been alerted. Furthermore, the police say that the Seguso's should leave the house immediately. Signore Seguso refuses to leave the house, telling his wife that they are not in any danger. Signora has her doubts as she looks out the window and sees the fire moving closer. However, she listens to her husband and settles down.

Venice is described as a "jigsaw puzzle of terra-cotta rooftops". The architecture is described to show potential problems that could arise because of the fire. The canal between the Seguso's house and the Fenice has been drained since the Fenice is under construction. This point is made because it will now be impossible for the



fireboats to reach the Fenice and there are no fire hydrants in Venice, just canals. The fireboats use the canals as a system of water. Shortly after the fire starts, Venetian citizens are alerted to the fire and watch in horror. Tenants are being evicted from their houses by the police and restaurant patrons are rushing out of the Ristorante Antico Martini. Hotel guests are pouring out of one hotel that is being evacuated in search of the hotel where they have been relocated.

Two fireboats are able to navigate the canal system and end up close to the Fenice. The hoses are not long enough, however, so the hoses must be lead through the kitchen of the Ristorante Antico Martini in order to reach the Fenice. The water pressure is too low, however, and the fire continues to rage out of control. Police shoot open the lock on the Fenice door in hopes of running in to salvage some of the Fenice. The situation takes a bleak turn when the police run back out, saying that it is too late for the Fenice. It is in this moment that the fire commissioner makes an important decision. It is too late for the Fenice; they must save the city.

The focus changes at this point in the chapter to the Marcello family. Count Girolamo Marcello is talking to his son during the middle of dinner when the lights go out. They sit in the dark for a little while, expecting the lights to come on. When the lights do not come back on and the Count hears many sirens, he decides to investigate. Count Girolamo Marcello and his son head up to the roof; when they see the inferno, they decide to evacuate the house immediately.

In the course of evacuating the house, Count Girolamo Marcello wonders if the opera house is doomed. If the house is indeed doomed, he will lose his library, which occupies most of the second floor. After leaving the house, Marcello and his son find themselves among a crowd that has gathered outside. Count Girolamo makes a few snide comments directed at the mayor of Venice, who is also standing in the crowd. He is justified in making these comments because his family is one that originally built the Fenice and had also owned it until the end of a world war when the municipality of Venice took over ownership.

Count Girolamo Marcello realizes during the course of the fire that his wife, Lesa, who was out of town on a "Save Venice" project, would most likely hear the story of the Fenice fire before hearing that her husband and family are safe. He rushes to call her and realizes that the "Save the Fenice" project is holding a ball in New York City on that very night.

Lesla Marcello receives the news of the Fenice fire a mere few hours before the ball is scheduled to take place. Not wanting to disappoint the partygoers and cancel the ball, she decides to turn it into a fundraiser to rebuild the Fenice.

Meanwhile, firefighters are telling the Segusos to evacuate the house they reside in. Signore Archimede Seguso still refuses to leave the house and his family will not leave without him. Firefighters are reluctant to allow the family to stay, but based on Archimede's dynasty, they relent. They do inform the family that they need to run a hose



through the Seguso's living room in order to help fight the fire. Archimede's son, Gino, goes to plead to his father to leave the house, but Archimede again refuses.

The setting changes once again to Haig's Bar. Girolamo Marcello is in the bar with other patrons, discussing the night's events. During the course of the discussion, the mafia is mentioned. The mafia had recently been involved in arson and bombings of other places. In an eerie resemblance, the Petruzzelli Opera House in Bari had been bombed by the mafia in 1991, just five years prior to the fire at the Fenice. Marcello cracks on the mafia, saying that if the fire is indeed the work of the mafia, they could have saved themselves the trouble. The Fenice has been such a mess during renovations that it was bound to start fire anyway. He describes how on a visit to the Fenice he noticed that there were flammable materials everywhere and how the place was "madness".

For the first time in four hours, Archimede Seguso steps away from the window to visit his family in the doorway of his bedroom and says that the family is safe now. Without saying anything else, he heads off to bed.

Meanwhile, as Archimede Seguso is heading off to bed in Venice, the "Save Venice" ball is just beginning in New York. At the beginning of the ball, an announcement is made that the Fenice is burning and cannot be saved. Furthermore, the announcement is made that all of the money raised tonight will be donated to the Fenice reconstruction. The theme of the ball was the carnival, which is a major celebration in Venice, but many partygoers decide to return home and change into formal attire. The mood has been doused and many do not feel like remaining in costume.

At 5:00 a.m. in Venice, Signore Archimede Seguso awakens after only three hours of sleep. He heads downstairs and then goes out the door to work after sipping a cup of coffee in the doorway and conversing with his wife. On the way to work, Archimede passes several people who try to converse about the fire at the Fenice. He speaks in passing to the people but does not slow his pace or stop to talk, but rather continues on his way to work. When he arrives at work, he begins immediately working on glass pieces inspired by the burning of the Fenice.

Chapter 1, "An Evening in Venice" Analysis

John Berendt arrives in Venice just three days after the fire has destroyed most of the historical opera house, the Fenice. Chapter one outlines the story of two different families on the night of the fire. The Segusos are introduced, as are the Marcellos. The Seguso family is sitting down to dinner when the wife, Signora Seguso, notices that the Fenice, a historical opera house in Venice, Italy is on fire. Signore Archimede Seguso refuses to leave the house so the family remains there. Meanwhile, the fire commissioner has established that it is too late for the Fenice and the main goal needs to be to save Venice.

Count Marcello and his son are in their house when they see the fire. They quickly evacuate the house and Marcello makes some inflammatory remarks directed at the

Venetian officials as to the rebuilding of the Fenice. Several theories arise during the discussion of the fire-the main one being arson.



Chapter 2, "Dust & Ashes"

Chapter 2, "Dust & Ashes" Summary

John Berendt is narrating the events that come to pass as he arrives in Venice a mere three days after the Fenice fire. He arrives by water taxi, as he usually does when he visits Venice, and he acknowledges the beauty of Venice. This is not Berendt's first visit to Venice, as he has been to Venice "a dozen times or more". Berendt navigates the reader through his eyes while on his water taxi ride through the canal. He elects to visit Venice during the mid-winter break because it is no longer tourist season and he can enjoy the city without the annoying bustling of the tourists. He realizes, however, that he arrives in Venice at a most interesting time due to the fire at the Fenice opera house.

Berendt is quickly taken in by the daily newspaper's front page. *Il Gazzettino* publishes a panoramic view of the city the day after the fire. In the center of the picture is the smoldering Fenice. The newspaper reveals several different suspicious events that had occurred directly leading up to the Fenice fire. For example, it is noted that someone unplugged the smoke detector and the heat sensor just a mere two days before the fire began. The reason given was because the fumes from the chemicals kept setting off the alarms. The sprinkler system had been deactivated and the security guard in charge of the Fenice had not made an appearance until at least twenty minutes after the fire had been called in.

Before the renovation, the Fenice had a cafe; open during its functioning hours. The cafe was supposed to be shut down during renovation, but the owner insisted upon keeping it open to feed the laborers. Signora Annamaria Rosato, the owner, used a makeshift kitchen that she moved constantly during her attempts to stay out of the way during the repairs. Her last known whereabouts were extremely close to the site of the fire origination, which causes Signora Rosato to figure prominently in the media as possibly causing the fire.

In addition to the makeshift cafe being moved around, there are also several copies of the key to the Fenice that cannot be accounted for. The copies had been handed out without notice and the owners cannot be identified. Simply put, anyone could have had access to the Fenice at any given time. Since there are so many speculations as to what or who could have caused the fire, a meeting is called a little later on the day of Berendt's arrival in Venice.

Berendt arrives at the site, the Campo San Fantin, about thirty minutes before the meeting begins. He finds that the meeting hall is already overflowing with native Venetians. On his way into the hall, Berendt catches little tidbits of gossip about the fire. Gino Seguso speaks of his father, Archimede, and states that his father has been nearly living at the glassworks, creating works of art, piece after piece. Archimede feels that it is his duty to reflect the events and colors of the fire in his artwork. Emilio Baldi, a restaurant owner, is busy estimating the losses his business will endure while the



Fenice is rebuilt. The view will no longer be a beautiful town square, but now a "noisy construction site".

Berendt takes a seat beside an older English lady as he anticipates the beginning of the meeting. The meeting consists of government officials who pledge that the Fenice will be rebuilt while simultaneously absolving themselves of any blame. The mayor of Venice, Mayor Cacciari, announces that the Fenice will be rebuilt in two years and that it will be rebuilt as it was, not in a modern fashion. While Mayor Cacciari is giving his speech, a voice calls out from the crowd, stating that the citizens of Venice elected Cacciari mayor when the Fenice was in its beautiful glory and that the citizens got it back in a pile of ashes. The voice turns out to belong to Ludovico De Luigi, a famous painter who has arrived home from New York.

Berendt revisits history in chapter two. He gives readers a glimpse into the late 1700s when Napoleon brought Venice to its knees. The demise of Venice had been a topic of history for 200 years. Berendt states that he understands why many stories that are set in Venice are mysteries. "Sinister moods could be easily conjured by shadowy back canals and labyrinthine passageways, where even the initiated sometimes lost their way".

After visiting Venice for a few days, Berendt makes the decision to live in Venice for a while, studying the people who have lived there, not the millions of tourists who visit each year. Berendt decides to rent an apartment instead of living in a hotel, and walks around each day with a notebook in hand, taking notes while studying the Venetian citizens. He notes that most books written about Venice are about the people who are passing through or about the city itself, but not about the citizens of the city, whom he insists are a completely different topic. He also chooses to stay and write about the citizens, because if the warnings about the rising sea levels are true, Venice may not be around for much longer.

Chapter 2, "Dust & Ashes" Analysis

Berendt is arriving in Venice via water taxi as he normally does when he visits Venice. Quickly taken in by the newspaper's panoramic view of Venice following the fire, Berendt dives into the mystery of the Fenice fire.

Several theories are examined as to how the fire started: a makeshift kitchen being transported throughout the construction site, keys being handed out without a record being kept of possession, and alarms and sprinkler systems being disconnected. Berendt attends a meeting later that day in the town hall to gather information about the fire and the plans for reconstruction. It is after this meeting that Berendt decides to take up residence in Venice for a few months to write this book. The focus of the book will be to study the Venetians, as they are the ones who hold the key to the real Venice, not the tourist attraction.



Chapter 3, "At Water Level"

Chapter 3, "At Water Level" Summary

In chapter three, Berendt rents an apartment from Peter and Rose Lauritzen in the Palazzo da Silva, a building that had been in the British embassy hundreds of years before. The Lauritzens' have lived in Venice for nearly thirty years. Rose is English and Peter is American. Berendt is flashing back to several months earlier when he had called to rent the apartment. Peter and Rose become good friends of Berendt's, as they take him through the building on a tour. Rose shares many valuable tidbits of information, like where to shop and how to get the citizen discount.

After showing Berendt about the building in which he will be staying, the Lauritzens invite him up to have a drink, which he graciously accepts. Without any questioning from Berendt, the subject of the fire at the Fenice is brought up by Peter. Peter tells Berendt that he has chosen the most particularly dramatic moment to visit Venice. Berendt asks Peter what he has been hearing about the night of the fire and Peter responds that he has only heard the usual stuff about the mafia's possible involvement. Peter goes on to state that it may never be known exactly what happened to cause the fire that night.

From there on, the conversation turns to the subject of Venice. Peter and Rose constantly overlap each other's conversations so that Berendt can barely follow both of them.

Chapter 3, "At Water Level" Analysis

In chapter three, Berendt is introduced to his landlords, Peter and Rose Lauritzen. Berendt learns a lot about the Venetian ways, including where to eat, where to shop, and who to befriend. After showing him around his new apartment, the Lauritzens invite Berendt up for a drink and some conversation. It is during this conversation that Peter brings up the topic of the fire. The conversation is closed when Peter states the fact that it might never be known exactly what sparked the fire at the Fenice.



Chapter 4, "Sleepwalking"

Chapter 4, "Sleepwalking" Summary

In chapter four, Berendt begins to describe to the reader the everyday occurrences in the city of Venice. He describes how the butcher takes a delivery of meat, how Giorgio sets up the trattoria, and how the fruit and vegetable dealer starts out on his route. When Berendt himself sets out for his morning walk, he encounters the Plant Man. Berendt describes his look as a moving shrub, but shortly thereafter, the Plant Man appears as a short man with wiry gray hair.

The Plant Man is standing out in the open selling plants to passersby when Berendt strikes up a conversation with him. The Plant Man introduces himself as Adriano Delon and tells Berendt that he comes to Venice every day of the week except for Sundays, when Adriano and his wife go ballroom dancing, which is televised. Berendt finds out that Adriano and his wife own a farm a half hour away from Venice. Adriano not only sells plants, but he sells chickens as well and does landscaping. He tells Berendt that he does the landscaping for the churches and parishes, and shows him the plucked and beheaded chicken he has in his sack for a later delivery.

One morning, with the intention of taking an early walk before the native Venetians hit the street, Berendt happens upon the pigeon catchers. They are four men who trap pigeons in order to rid the city of them. When Berendt becomes inquisitive, the men give him the name of their boss: Dr. Scattolin. Later on, Berendt calls on Dr. Scattolin to see if he will meet with him to discuss the pigeons. Dr. Scattolin graciously agrees.

Dr. Scattolin discusses the pigeons with Berendt. Venetians hate pigeons, so Dr. Scattolin and his company rid the city of as many pigeons as they can by killing them. He says that it is the only way to ensure the birds do not return. The pigeons in Venice reproduce seven or eight times a year, laying two eggs per pigeon, which is part of the problem, explains Dr. Scattolin. The pigeons in London only reproduce once a year, so getting rid of the pigeons in Venice is a yearlong project.

After meeting with Dr. Scattolin, Berendt takes a trip to visit the famed Garden of Eden, named after Frederic Eden, the creator of the garden. However, the trip takes a disappointing turn when Berendt is turned away. The garden, it seems, has been allowed to revert to its normal wild state after the house is bought out by a new owner.

The trip takes an interesting turn when Berendt meets a literal Jack-Of-All-Trades, Mario Moro. Moro holds several different jobs within the city that allow him to wear different uniforms every time that Berendt sees him, which makes Berendt become interested in Moro and his ways.

Berendt later on meets Giovanni Volpi, the son of the founder of the Volpi Cups that Italy awards to its best actors and actresses. In addition to founding the Volpi Cups,



Giuseppe Volpi was also responsible for bringing electricity to Venice, restoring a shabby palace and turning it into the world-famous Gritti hotel, and he was an instrumental influence in the Turkish-Italian peace treaty of 1912.

Berendt's reason for visiting Giovanni Volpi is because Volpi, earlier in the week, had made some pretty inflammatory remarks in the newspaper regarding the film festival management. When Berendt meets with Volpi, he discovers that Volpi's contempt is due to the total lack of respect toward Giovanni, Volpi's father. He states many reasons for his contempt, and says that if the city were to name a street after his father, Volpi would no longer speak badly of Venetians.

Chapter 4, "Sleepwalking" Analysis

In chapter four, Berendt wakes up early in the morning to take a walk before the town awakens. His purpose is to get an idea of what Venice is like before the town wakes up. On his morning walk, he notices four men very skillfully trapping pigeons. When he questions them about their motives, they direct him to Dr. Scattolin, the man in charge of the operation. Dr. Scattolin agrees to meet with Berendt and tells Berendt the truth: the pigeons are killed in an attempt to control the pigeon population in Venice. Later on, Berendt meets with Giovanni Volpi to discuss the reasons why Volpi detests Venetians.



Chapter 5, "Slow Burn"

Chapter 5, "Slow Burn" Summary

The preliminary results are announced regarding the Fenice fire. It is revealed that the cause is not arson. Wooden beams on the third floor had burned through all the way, giving the indication that the fire spread slowly. Felice Casson, a young looking, handsome prosecutor makes up a list of possible suspects that are being investigated for negligence.

The carnival is introduced in chapter 5. The carnival is a celebration in which parties are held, games are played, and people dress in costume so that they cannot be recognized. The carnival, which used to last only two weeks, now lasts six months. The carnival is a revival of an age-old Venetian festival—a tradition that was put to an end when Napoleon defeated the Venetian republic. Newly revived, however, the carnival is just beginning and Berendt decides to buy himself a mask to wear while attending the carnival ball with the Lauritzens.

At the shop where Berendt purchases his mask, he meets Guerrino Lovato. Guerrino Lovato is a famous sculptor and set designer who started making masks when the Venetians revived the carnival. It is while Berendt is in the shop that Berendt notices many different books and photos of the Fenice in Lovato's workshop. He questions Lovato about it and Lovato openly discusses the fire. Lovato claims that everything was lost in the fire and the original drawings are nowhere to be found, so it will be difficult to build the Fenice the way it was, if indeed the Fenice is ever rebuilt. Berendt questions as to why the Fenice would not be rebuilt, and Lovato explains that it's not for want; but rather, it seems to take forever to restore buildings and Lovato expects no less for the Fenice.

The mayor takes a visiting Woody Allen into the ruins of the Fenice and Allen responds with absolute horror. The real horror, however, happens when Felice Casson charges Woody Allen with trespassing in the Fenice.

Chapter 5, "Slow Burn" Analysis

The preliminary results of the fire are announced, and the fire is deemed an accident. Felice Casson, a prosecutor, creates a list of people to be investigated for acts of negligence that could have contributed to the fire. Later, Berendt is out picking out a mask for the carnival ball he is to attend with the Lauritzens when he meets Guerrino Lovato. Lovato is a sculptor who is intently studying the Fenice and is hoping that it will be rebuilt, although his outlook is bleak. Woody Allen is taken into the ruins and later charged with trespassing by Felice Casson.



Chapter 6, "The Rat Man of Treviso"

Chapter 6, "The Rat Man of Treviso" Summary

Chapter 6 opens with Berendt arriving at the Carnival ball with the Lauritzens. The ball takes place at the Palazzo Pisani-Moretta, a palace with a gothic facade. Rose Lauritzen is talking about Woody Allen, and how he had been charged with trespassing at the Fenice. At the ball, Berendt meets the McAlpines-Alistair and Romilly. The McAlpines came to live in Venice after their house in London was bombed by the IRA. Berendt joins the Lauritzens at a table with many other people. It is at this table that Berendt meets the rat man of Treviso.

The rat man of Treviso is a man who is the inventor of one of the world's most popular rat poison. The chapter centralizes on Massimo Donadon, a man who refers to himself as a world-renowned chef. When asked if he is famous for a single specialty, he concurs, stating that his specialty is rat poison, much to the horror of the woman who asks.

Massimo Donadon volunteers all the secrets of his trade when it comes to how he is so successful. He explains that rats are like people: their eating habits are simple. Rats in Italy are prone to eating Italian food, while rats in America are used to eating American food. In essence, rats eat what is available. In order to make the rat poison attractive to rats, it is made in different tastes according to the countries in which it will be sold. The rat poison is also made so that the poison will not cause pain in the rats, which is an important part of the poison. When rats test out a new food, the older rats are the ones who taste it first. If the poison causes extreme pains in the older rats and then kills them, the younger rats will not eat the poison. However, Donadon's poison does not cause an immediate reaction in rats; but rather, causes the results within four days. By then, the younger rats have eaten it as well.

As dinner is being served, Berendt notices that many masks are disappearing from the guests' faces. He also notices that many guests are wearing formal attire rather than costumes. Inquisitive, Berendt asks Peter Lauritzen what has happened to the spirit of the Carnival. Peter replies that the Carnival will never reach the heights that it did before Napoleon banished it. As Berendt is discussing this with the Lauritzens, two men stand up and show themselves to be a couple of genital parts, to which Rose remarks, "now, that's what I call Carnival".

Chapter 6, "The Rat Man of Treviso" Analysis

Berendt arrives at the Carnival ball with the Lauritzens and meets Massimo Donadon. Massimo Donadon is an entrepreneur who specializes in rat poison. He describes his trade in great detail and gives much more information that was asked of him. Berendt notices during dinner that many of the guests are removing their masks, and



subsequently notices that most of the guests are dressed in formal attire and not costumes. Before leaving, however, he does see two men who are dressed as the male and female genital parts.



Chapter 7, "Glass Warfare"

Chapter 7, "Glass Warfare" Summary

Chapter seven focuses on the story of the Seguso family. Archimede is the master glassworker in the family while Gino, his son, is the manager. It comes to light, however, that there is another family member who is also involved in the business, if not directly. Gino's brother, Giampaolo, is the self-proclaimed black sheep of the family. According to Gino, Giampaolo and he had several arguments over the way the business was being run. Gino, along with Archimede, wanted the business to continue in the manner that it had always been run, while Giampaolo had ideas for modernizing the company. When he was outvoted on the issue, he attempted to have his father buy him out of his thirty percent share of the company. When his father refused, Giampaolo then attempted to have Archimede declared incompetent so he could sue the company. Archimede and Gino countersued and won.

That is not the end of Giampaolo's sneaky underhandedness. Giampaolo secretly had his father's name trademarked so nobody could use it. With this, he could swipe his father's identity and oust his family from the dynasty that is rightfully theirs. He leaves the business with aspirations of writing books on glasswork, but instead starts his own chain of glasswork companies.

Knowing that there are always two sides to the story, Berendt arranges to meet with Giampaolo to hear his side. Giampaolo makes it clear from the beginning that he is going to be candid, which helps Berendt in leading the interview. Giampaolo defends his actions, stating that he tried to have his father declared incompetent in order to sue his brother. He said that he could not outright sue his father, so he made his brother, Gino, the target instead. His justifications for having his father's name trademarked was simply that he did not want any other company to pass off work as the art of the Seguso family.

Berendt digs into the family history when he asks Giampaolo if he ever contacted his family after the big falling out. Giampaolo's response is that he sent flowers to his mother for her wedding anniversary during the first year. His mother sent back the flowers and a few days later sent a letter. The letter enclosed the card Giampaolo had sent to his parents; the card was unopened, and a letter was enclosed saying, "you know why."

Giampaolo also notes the major difference between Archimede and himself: Archimede thinks of himself as the last runner in the race while Giampaolo believes there is no such thing.



Chapter 7, "Glass Warfare" Analysis

Glass warfare is the story of a feud within the Seguso family. Giampaolo, the self-proclaimed black sheep of the family uses underhanded tactics to try and steal the company from his father and brother. He defends his actions, stating that he only ever meant to do good for the company and was trying to protect his father's name in the event of Archimede's demise.

Gino and Archimede see it another way, however. Gino claims that Giampaolo is trying to collect on Giampaolo's thirty percent of the company after he left. His father, Archimede, refuses to buy him out. This is when Giampaolo begins his tactics. First, he tries to have his father declared incompetent. When that fails, it is then revealed that Giampaolo secretly had his father's name trademarked in an attempt to try to steal the family dynasty from under his family.



Chapter 8, "Expatriates: The First Family"

Chapter 8, "Expatriates: The First Family" Summary

As chapter 8 opens, Berendt is taking a walk across the Accademia Bridge. As he is walking across the bridge, he notices a woman completely dressed in white getting into a motorboat with her husband. About a week later, Berendt sees the woman again, and again she is dressed completely in white. When he questions Rose Lauritzen about the woman he saw, Rose states that the woman must be Patricia Curtis, as she always dresses in white. This ignites a conversation about the Curtis family.

The Curtis's are an old Bostonian family who bought the Palazzo Barbaro centuries ago. Daniel Curtis, after getting into an altercation with a man on a subway train, served time in prison, then moved to Venice shortly after his release. The palace has been in the family since Daniel Curtis and his family purchased it.

Curious about her family history, Berendt calls up Patricia Curtis and arranges to meet with her when she returns from Malaysia in a month. In the meantime, Berendt studies up on the history of the Palazzo Barbaro as well as the history of the Curtis family. When studying the Daniel Curtis incident, he discovers that over 300 of the highest regarded citizens of Massachusetts started a petition to get Curtis released from prison. Curtis refused to sign the petition, stating that his actions were justified and he would not apologize. Daniel Curtis served his two months in prison. He did not immediately leave the country, but instead, because of his contempt for America, left eight years after being released from prison.

In Venice, the Barbaro family had been true men working as philosophers, mathematicians, diplomats, and scientists. The Barbaro family lived in the palace for four centuries before Napoleon defeated Venice. The fortune of the Barbaro family dwindled, and as they struggled to maintain ownership, they moved into one wing and divided the rest of the palace into apartments.

After the last Barbaro died, the place was bought out and the contents auctioned off. When Daniel and Ariana Curtis purchased the Palazzo Barbaro, they were viewed as saviors of the palace. The Curtis's inspired goodwill to such a point that it carried over into the next few generations of the family. Now, over 100 years later, the Curtis family is in danger of losing the palace.

When a generation of the Curtis family died, the palace was left to the three remaining siblings: Ralph, Lisa, and Patricia. Patricia is currently the only one living in the palace. Lisa is married and lives in Paris; Ralph is divorced and also lives in Paris. Patricia is the only one who wants to keep the palace; her brother and sister barely have any use for it. Ralph and Lisa grumble when they have to pay for the repairs to the palace



because of its normal wear and tear. Patricia is outvoted and agrees to sell the piano nobile on the market. It is only a matter of time before it is sold.

After researching the history of the Barbaro, Berendt peruses through the telephone book and finds a number for Ralph Curtis. He gets in contact with Ralph and discovers that Ralph's answering machine message states that whoever is calling has reached the "Earth liaison station of the Democratic Republic of the Planet Mars". A bit confused, Berendt hangs up the phone, checks the number, and tries his call again. Again, he receives the same message, but decides to leave a message for Ralph Curtis. When Berendt actually receives a telephone call later, he realizes that Ralph Curtis is as weird as his answering machine message indicates. When Berendt asks permission to see the Palazzo Barbaro, Ralph Curtis sends him an application that asks for his toe print of his right big toe. Suspecting that he might be the victim of a put-on, he nevertheless completes the application, big toe print and all, and sends it in. He receives a phone call a few days later and sets up an appointment to visit the Barbaro the next day. He finds that he doesn't really get a good tour of the building, but rather is subjected to a stimulated take-off.

Patricia returns from Malaysia, sends Berendt a fax stating that she is back in town, and is willing to show him the Palace. He meets with Patricia and sees that her white outfit is not just plain white, but a mixture of shades of white. Patricia gives Berendt a more thorough tour of the Palace, showing him the desk of Henry James, a painting by Gaimbattista Tiepolo, the portego, and a room where Robert Browning used to read his poetry aloud. Patricia shows Berendt a painting of herself, painted by Charles Merrill Mount. She had posed in a white strapless gown and Berendt muses to himself that maybe this is the reason why she always wears white now.

Berendt meets with Daniel Curtis, Patricia's son and the namesake of the original Daniel Curtis who bought the palace a century ago. Daniel explains the process that his family went through looking for a buyer for the Palazzo Barbaro. A buyer by the name of Ivano Beggio finally purchased the palace and Daniel swears that he will buy the palace back one day, stating, "It would not be the first time someone named Daniel Curtis bought the Palazzo Barbaro".

Chapter 8, "Expatriates: The First Family" Analysis

Berendt is out taking a walk one day when he notices a woman dressed completely in white. When he sees her again about a week later, his curiosity gets the best of him. He mentions the woman to Rose and Peter Lauritzen who inform him that she must be Patricia Curtis. Berendt's curiosity takes over and he contacts Patricia Curtis, requesting to take a look at the Palazzo Barbaro. She is leaving town for a month, but she promises to show it to him when she returns. In the meantime, Berendt does all he can to study up on the history of the Curtis family and the Palazzo Barbaro. He meets with Ralph Curtis, the brother of Patricia, and finds him to be an odd character. When Berendt is offered a tour by Ralph, he takes it up and gets nothing out of the experience rather than a simulated spaceship take-off.



When Patricia returns from Malaysia, she takes him on a tour of the Palace, showing him rooms wherein many famous people wrote and read poetry aloud. She also shows him a painting of herself by Charles Merrill Mount, which gives Berendt some insight into why Patricia always wears white. He later meets Daniel Curtis, Patricia's son and the namesake of the Daniel Curtis that purchased the palace 100 years ago. Daniel is bitter at the idea of the palace being sold and promises to one day buy it back.



Chapter 9, "The Last Canto"

Chapter 9, "The Last Canto" Summary

Chapter nine focuses on several different stories. In the beginning, Berendt recalls a story of Henry James writing a book while staying at the Palazzo Barbaro. The title of the book is *The Aspern Papers*, and is a psychological thriller that Henry James based on a real life story. Berendt notes that the book has the same theme as another of his books, *The Wings of the Dove*: the theme of love as a means of gaining something of value.

Berendt makes a visit to the Palazzo Capello, the model of Henry James' book. He comes in contact with a dour-faced woman who denies him access to the garden to take a look.

Berendt confesses that he first thinks of the book about a month after the fire at the Fenice. He reads in the newspaper that Olga Rudge has died at the age of 101. The story of Olga Rudge is similar to the book that Henry James wrote in 1887. Olga Rudge, Berendt explains, is a woman who has an affair with a married poet-Ezra Pound-much like the main character in *The Aspern Papers*. Another similarity is that Ezra Pound and Olga Rudge had an illegitimate daughter, but this is where the similarities end. Olga's affair with Pound lasted fifty years; it was not a brief affair.

Berendt's curiosity gets the better of him and he makes a visit to Rio Fornace to see the house that Olga Rudge shared with Ezra Pound. He discovers that the house is empty, and he is unable to see inside due to frosted glass; but while nosing around the house, he hears noise from the neighbors next door. Berendt visits the house next door and discovers that the man, James Harkins, is an Anglican minister. Berendt is invited by Jim and his wife to join them for cocktails. Berendt does not wish to offend the Harkins by directly asking them about Olga, so he begins to ask James about the church. After discussing the church for a few minutes, Berendt casually brings Olga Rudge into the conversation. Dora, James' wife, perks up at the mention of Olga's name.

Dora tells Berendt that she never met Olga, but had heard about her from the previous Anglican minister that used to live in their house. Olga, even in her nineties, was a delightful person who took an interest in everyone and wore fashionable clothing. Dora goes on to say that growing old in Venice is terrible. When Berendt asks why, Dora explains that there are no motorcars in Venice so it is hard for older people to get around. Not only is it hard to get around, but it is hard for people to get to the elderly to check on them in case something goes wrong. Dora also explains that the elderly people have to put their trust in outsiders. This statement is where the story of deceit and the Ezra Pound Foundation begins. Dora tells Berendt about the valuable papers that Olga had possession of that just mysteriously vanished.



After meeting with the Harkins', Berendt returns home where he sits down with the Lauritzens. Rose is the first person to mention the Ezra Pound Foundation. When questioned about it, Rose admits she knows almost nothing about it and doesn't want to get the details wrong, so she declines to talk about it. Peter leads the explanation from there. Berendt listens as Peter details the Ezra Pound Foundation, a foundation that was supposed to promote the study of Ezra Pound and his works. The mystery surrounding the establishment of the foundation is that most of the people who should've known about it did not. When pressed for further detail, Peter suggests that Berendt contact Jane Ryland.

A brief history is given of Olga and Ezra. They met in 1923 at the Paris salon of Natalie Barney. They became lovers after they met and Ezra divided his time between Olga and his wife. In 1925, Olga gave birth to Pound's daughter and they placed the girl in foster care. Olga was never financially dependent on Pound, but instead held her own job and own interests. Pound and his wife were forced to move in with Olga after the outbreak of war. This was an uncomfortable situation as both women loved Ezra and he loved both of them. The two women despised each other, and it was a house full of tension. The relationship between Pound and Olga survived many obstacles, including when Pound was committed to a mental institution for thirteen years. During those thirteen years, Olga and Pound wrote to one another, but Olga was not permitted to see him. After he was released from the institution, he lived with Dorothy, his wife, for a few years before deciding that he wanted to live with Olga. He lived with Olga for the remaining eleven years of his life.

For twenty years after Ezra Pound died, Olga continued to live in the house that she and Pound shared. She did not live sequestered and still entertained visitors and continued her life. She remained committed to living in Venice even in her old age. It is during this time that she met the Rylands: Jane and Philip. On the surface, Jane Ryland appeared to be heaven-sent; but as time went on, Jane exerted control over Olga, especially after Olga started suffering from Alzheimer's. Around the time that Olga began becoming confused and disoriented, several thousands of her papers disappeared. These papers consisted of thousands of letters between her and Pound as well as letters from other famous people. These papers were later sold under a private settlement between the Rylands and Yale.

Berendt attempts to contact the Rylands to discuss the Ezra Pound Foundation, but is met with resistance. He then contacts Olga and Pound's daughter, Mary. Mary is cautious, but agrees to meet with Berendt. Before meeting with Mary, he reads her book, *Discretions*. In the book, Mary details her strained relationship with her mother and her adoration of her father. When Berendt reaches Mary's house, he notices that she never lost the touch of her foster care roots. Upon learning that Mary was working on a farm and only occasionally brushing her teeth, her mother had removed her from foster care when she was ten. Along with meeting Mary, Berendt meets Walter, Mary's son. Walter shows Berendt the documents that he is legally allowed to show him and tells him how the Rylands took advantage of the feud between Olga and Mary. Not only were Olga's letters stolen, but two of her valuable paintings were stolen too. The paintings were later returned by Jane Ryland in their original condition.



After meeting with Mary, Berendt takes a brief trip to the United States to visit the Beinecke Library in New Haven. It is there that he reads the letters between Olga and Ezra and gains an insight into what their life was like. Out of all the 208 boxes of letters that were on display for the public, one box, box number 156, was off limits. The box was to remain sealed until 2016. Upon questioning, Berendt discovers that the box holds the papers of the Ezra Pound Foundation and nobody knows what is inside the box. The reason the box is to remain sealed until 2016 is because of a settlement reached during the transaction of buying the papers from Olga and the Ezra Pound Foundation.

When Berendt returns to Venice, he returns to the Harkins' house to pick up the key to the Hidden Nest, Olga's house, which Mary has left for him. Berendt has arranged to rent out the house for the next six weeks because it appeals to him to view Venice from this location.

Chapter 9, "The Last Canto" Analysis

The last canto tells the story of Henry James' book, *The Aspern Papers*, and its similarity to the story of Olga Rudge and Ezra Pound. Ezra Pound is a famous poet who has written many poems and Cantos-Epic poems. Ezra meets Olga one day at a concert and they become lovers. The affair lasts for fifty years and they have an illegitimate daughter together. Ezra spends the last eleven years of his life living with Olga. After his death, Olga continues her life, but as the reader learns, elderly people do not have it easy in Venice. There are no motor cars and it is difficult for the elderly to get places and have people get to them.

This is why when Olga befriends Philip and Jane Ryland, who seem heaven-sent, out of need for care giving. Jane Ryland, however, seems to have ulterior motives, motives that are proved when all of Olga's private papers go missing. The private papers are thousands of letters between Olga and Ezra as well as those to and from many other famous people. The papers are never recovered, but rather are sold to Yale under a private settlement between Yale and the Rylands.

Berendt meets with several people regarding the Ezra Pound Foundation, a foundation that is supposed to be a dedication to study the works of Ezra Pound. The foundation is supposed to be run by Olga, but somehow Jane Ryland, through means of persistence and taking advantage of Olga's Alzheimer's, has taken control of the foundation. The foundation is eventually dissolved, but not before Olga has been scammed out of her belongings. Berendt meets with Mary de Rachewiltz, Olga and Pound's illegitimate daughter, and rents the house that Olga once shared with Pound for six weeks.



Chapter 10, "For a Couple of Bucks"

Chapter 10, "For a Couple of Bucks" Summary

Berendt is sitting for lunch with Ludovico de Luigi. Berendt is surprised at the headline of the newspaper. The newspaper has published a story in which the fire at the Fenice has been officially declared arson. Ludovico cannot believe that Berendt is surprised. Berendt responds with, "why wouldn't I be?". The fire was determined to be an accident in January after the occurrence and now in June the supposed cause is arson. Berendt asks Ludovico if he has known it was arson all along and Ludovico responds with the fact that he's not even sure at this moment. All of a sudden, before their very eyes, a seagull lands and pecks the heart out of a pigeon. Ludovico uses this as an example of the strong versus the weak.

Now that the cause of the fire is ruled arson, it is necessary for the prosecutor, Felice Casson, to identify the criminals responsible. The mafia once again becomes an issue as the prosecutor compares the similarities between the Fenice fire and the fire at Petruzzelli opera house in 1991. The disturbing similarity is the fact that both the Petruzzelli and the Fenice fires started on the upper floors and spread in a lateral direction.

"Angel Face" Maniero is a mafia refugee. He was caught and sent to prison where he became an informer and was responsible for the leading arrests of more than 300 mafia members. Maniero was released under the witness protection program shortly before the fire, so the speculation is that if Maniero did not set the fire himself, it may be possible that the mafia set the fire and framed Maniero.

Casson does more digging into the possible suspects. It is known that twenty-five people had been working on the Fenice restoration the day of the fire, and Casson wishes to know whom the last people to leave were. Casson makes a point of repeatedly questioning Paggiaro, the custodian on duty the night of the fire. He is not directly implicated in the fire, but Casson believes that the custodian left his post without proper permission.

The investigation leads to two prime suspects: Enrico Carella and Massimiliano Marchetti. Casson explains his theory of what might have happened-Carella walked upstairs and poured solvent onto raw plank boards. Then Carella went into the changing room and changed with the guys. Before heading out, he excused himself to make a phone call in the custodian's office with Marchetti waiting outside the door for him. The other electricians left and then Marchetti and Carella headed upstairs, used a blowtorch to set fire to the raw plank boards covered with solvent, and then ran downstairs and out the stage door as the fire started to spread. The lawyers for Carella and Marchetti immediately start attacking Casson's theory, stating that many other events could have happened that Casson was not paying attention to.



The chapter then focuses back to Berendt, who is with Ludovico de Luigi. Ludovico takes Berendt to meet an arson expert who has investigated six or seven hundred different arson cases: Gianpietro Zucchetto. Zucchetto tells Berendt that he has been asked to investigate the fire at the Fenice, but refuses to do so because the arson is a political arson, surrounded by politics, something he wishes to have no part of.

Chapter 10, "For a Couple of Bucks" Analysis

Berendt reads of the change in the theory of the Fenice fire. Instead of an accident, now, six months later, it is ruled as arson. Not only does he learn about the arson charges, but also the reason behind them when he interviews Felice Casson, a prosecutor. Casson explains the many reasons that he believes it is an arson case and also reveals how he came to finger Enrico Carella and Massimiliano Marchetti. Casson explains his case to Berendt, including his theory on how the fire started. Casson's theories come under attack from the defendant's lawyers.

Berendt meets Zucchetto, an arson expert, and learns of his reasons behind not wanting to investigate the Fenice fire.



Chapter 11, "Opera Buffa"

Chapter 11, "Opera Buffa" Summary

Opera Buffa tells the story of the bidding war to rebuild the Fenice. Many designers are coming in from out of town to submit bids for rebuilding the Fenice. Gianni Agnelli is one designer who comes to town. Berendt recognizes him when he's heading to Saint Mark's in a water vaporetto and a taxi falls in behind him. The telltale sign that this was Gianni Agnelli is the fact that Agnelli wears his watch over his shirt cuff. Agnelli is known to the public as "L'Avvocato", the lawyer. A decade earlier, Agnelli had assembled a team to restore the Palazzo Grassi. He has assembled the same team to work on the rebuilding of the Fenice. The team includes Gae Aulenti from Milan and Antonio Foscari from Venice.

Berendt meets with Foscari to discuss the plans for the rebuilding of the Fenice. Foscari tells Berendt that he was invited by a French team and a Spanish team as well, but once Agnelli began assembling the same team that worked on the Palazzo Grassi, he knew that he was meant to be on this team. Foscari knows that his real strengths will be that he knows the building procedures in Venice and he has experience when it comes to dealing with the bureaucracy in Venice.

Berendt also meets with Francesco da Mosto, who had been giving his first dinner party as half of a newly married couple when the Fenice fire began. Da Mosto is an architect who belongs to one of the oldest families in Venice. Da Mosto is one of the builders who put a bid in to rebuild the Fenice. He shows the preliminary plans to Berendt and discusses the specifics of the documents. Da Mosto explains that since the most recent architectural specifications were found with written instructions, the measurements that Da Mosto's specifications contain are all exact. Despite the research and the amount of time he has put into his plans, Da Mosto still expects Gianni Agnelli to win.

Although six bids are entered for the rebuilding of the Fenice, one is immediately disqualified for not including an anti-mafia letter with the documents. This leaves five candidates remaining. The results are announced June 2, 1997: Impreglio, Agnelli's company, won the project with a bid of \$45 million. Although Agnelli's team has promising results, the work stops almost as soon as it starts. Since Agnelli's documents have no mention of the south wing, it is disqualified. Many questions are asked: "would Impreglio be reimbursed for the \$15 million it had spent already", who would pay for the late fees, which company would pay for the equipment fees that were accumulating despite the fact that no work was being done? Many problems surround the rebuilding and all the while, no work is being done.



Chapter 11, "Opera Buffa" Analysis

Chapter 11 focuses on the bidding for the rebuilding of the Fenice. Although six companies submit bids, one is immediately disqualified which leaves five companies left. The award is given to Gianni Agnelli, a famous builder who had rebuilt the Palazzo Grassi a decade before. The beginning stages of the building go according to plan, and promises are made that the Fenice will re-open in 1999. However, a court rules that Agnelli's documents are invalid because they lack a plan for the south wing. Chaos ensues, causing millions of dollars to be lost, as well as delaying the rebuilding. While the project is re-assigned, it is obvious that the task of rebuilding the Fenice will not be an easy one.



Chapter 12, "Beware of Falling Angels"

Chapter 12, "Beware of Falling Angels" Summary

Lesa Marcello meets with Berendt to discuss the operations of Save Venice. Save Venice recently unveiled the Church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, a 500-year-old church that has taken ten years to renovate. Lesa discusses how Save Venice handles conflicts. Instead of pitting one idea against another, she compares them side by side and offers solutions that may not seem very different but are indeed important.

Lesa receives a fax at her office from Bob Guthrie, stating that the Torta prize must be given as a whole and cannot be singled out to one person only. Without mentioning the individual who had been singled out, Lesa automatically knows that it is Larry Lovett. There has been an ongoing feud between Larry Lovett and Bob Guthrie for several years.

Larry Lovett and Bob Guthrie used to be friends. It was Larry Lovett who talked Bob Guthrie into becoming the treasurer on the board of Save Venice when Lovett was the president. When Lovett sent Guthrie the books for Save Venice after Guthrie accepted the job, Guthrie realized that the foundation was essentially dead. Lovett shared an idea of having a dinner party to raise funds and this is when Save Venice grew into something bigger than had ever been expected. Now, instead of just saving paintings and art, Save Venice would restore entire buildings.

The foundation thrived for several years before the feuding began between Lovett and Guthrie. The feud was quiet and small at first, but over the course of a decade, it grew to become a major issue between the two supposed heads of Save Venice. It came down to the point where both men were recruiting proxies in order to be re-elected president of the foundation.

Lesa Marcello, after reading the fax from Guthrie, counter replies with the fact that the Torta prize has always been always given to an individual. If the Torta prize is being given to a foundation or an organization, it will be given in the name of someone of the foundation; in this case, Lovett. After Guthrie receives her reply, she is fired from the foundation and given a bunch of excuses.

Count Marcello, unhappy with the way his wife has been treated, shows up at the next Save Venice board meeting in New York. He takes the floor at the meeting and gives the members a "dressing-down". He goes on further, saying that Bob Guthrie should be stripped of his position as president. Instead of Guthrie stepping down, he and Lovett again have another election after Guthrie's term expires. Each man throws their own party in order to accumulate votes. It becomes apparent, however, that Guthrie is more involved with the foundation than Lovett, who shows that he is more interested in himself and how he is portrayed than in the foundation.



Chapter 12, "Beware of Falling Angels" Analysis

Lesa Marcello receives a fax from Bob Guthrie, who demands that the Torta prize be given to Save Venice as a whole instead of in the name of Larry Lovett. The feud between Guthrie and Lovett has been ongoing for years and a detailed history is given of both sides. Lesa counteracts the instructions in Guthrie's fax, and is fired for her troubles. Her husband, extremely unhappy with the way his wife has been treated and the way the feud is progressing, attends a board meeting in New York, and there demands that Guthrie step down. The opposite happens, however, when Guthrie's term expires a few months later. Another election is held between Lovett and Guthrie with many proxies being sought out. Guthrie is re-elected and it is shown that Lovett is more concerned with his appearance and portrayal than he is with the foundation.



Chapter 13, "The Man Who Loved Others"

Chapter 13, "The Man Who Loved Others" Summary

Readers are introduced to Mario Stefani, a famous poet, in chapter 13. Mario Stefani appears to be a quirky character on his TV show, addressing imaginary people and the like. Outwardly gay, many of Stefani's poems are erotic, ranging from playful to graphic.

Many pieces of graffiti signed by Mario Stefani are appearing around the city, but he denies that it is he, insisting that it is a fan, instead. A shocking event happens about a month after the first piece of graffiti is noticed; Mario hangs himself in his kitchen. His suicide is discovered by a friend of his, Elena de Maria. While waiting for Mario, Elena had called and received no answer from his house. After Mario neglected to show up for their meeting, she called the fire department. The fire department discovered his body in the kitchen and dragged him downstairs in a body bag.

Venetians are shocked at his death, refusing to believe that Mario could have committed suicide. His pieces of graffiti are now seen as a cry of pain instead of a publicity stunt. After Stefani's death, many different wills were found, each leaving his estate to different people. Berendt meets with Stefani's publisher to discuss Mario's wills. It turns out that the third and final will names Nicola Bernardi as his heir. Stefani's publisher, Gardin, raises the issue that the will should be investigated and is harassed by a person who writes many threats on his store window in blue felt marker.

After a while, Gardin loses interest in pursuing the mysterious will and becomes involved with another dispute. Berendt chooses to visit him after Mario's death and is stopped cold at the door when he sees a sale advertised for the store-written in blue felt marker-which leaves one with the impression that Gardin himself wrote the threats and claimed he was being harassed.

Chapter 13, "The Man Who Loved Others" Analysis

The shocking death of Mario Stefani, a famous poet in Venice, is discovered in this chapter. Many illusions are left that Mario was not a happy person and that, despite his happy persona, he was indeed very lonely. Mario was openly gay and definitely quirky in his ways, always changing his mind about important issues.

His inconsistency in opinion is brought to light when it is discovered that more than one will exists regarding Mario's estate, which totals to over \$1 million. Gardin, Mario's publisher, disputes the validity of the will and writes threats on his storefront window in hopes of creating a scandal. In the end, however, it is revealed that the person who wrote the threats on Gardin's store window was none other than Gardin himself.



Chapter 14, "The Inferno Revisited"

Chapter 14, "The Inferno Revisited" Summary

Chapter 14 opens with Berendt questioning Laura Migliori about her techniques to restore the six scenes from *The Divine Comedy* that remain in the Dante Room of the Fenice. Laura Migliori is an art conservator who has been hired to restore the six paintings that remained. She explains that in order to save the paintings, many steps are involved. The paintings, frescoes, have been separated from the walls in certain spots so it is necessary to cover the paintings with thin Japanese papers in order to prevent pieces from falling off, then injecting plaster into the spaces to secure it to the wall. After that, the paper will be removed and color samples will be taken. The paintings must be patted with a cleaning substance in order to clean the paintings. Migliori is unsure of what she will find because the Fenice has had no roof for the past four years so nature may have taken a toll on them. It is pointed out that, due to the dispute between the construction companies mentioned in chapter 11, she cannot begin restoration until the situation is settled.

The trial of two men suspected of setting the fire to the Fenice: Enrico Carella and Massimiliano Marchetti, comes to a close. Casson spends five hours detailing the case against the two electricians. Among the details presented is the suspected theory about the suspects pouring solvent on a pile of wood and later using a blowtorch to ignite the wood. The bomb that almost secured the case was the fact that after a lengthy questioning, the two men get back into their car. The car, unbeknownst to the men, had been bugged and many incriminating statements had been made.

After the trial ends, the two electricians are found guilty, but remain free on bail with an appeal pending. Carella is convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison while Marchetti is sentenced to six years. However, as the appeal is refused, Marchetti is taken to jail to serve his sentence and Carella is nowhere to be found. Carella had taken off before the police came to pick him up, and has not been seen since.

Chapter 14, "The Inferno Revisited" Analysis

Berendt meets with Laura Migliori at the Fenice to discuss the techniques that she as an art conservator will use to restore six frescoes in the Fenice. It is detailed work and she is unable to start immediately because of the standstill in the rebuilding of the Fenice.

The trial of the two electricians charged with the arson of the Fenice ends with a guilty verdict. Carella and Marchetti are sentenced to seven and six years, respectively. They remain free on bail while filing an appeal. The appeal is later refused and the police pick up Marchetti to take him to prison to serve his sentence. Carella, however, is nowhere to be found.



Chapter 15, "Open House"

Chapter 15, "Open House" Summary

Chapter 15 closes the novel. Berendt gives an overview of the events that have happened since the beginning of the novel when the fire at the Fenice began. Berendt also fills in the details of opening night as the Fenice re-opens after years of reconstruction.

When the Fenice reopens, it is established that operas will not begin for a year because the backstage crew does not know how to use the scenery equipment. Orchestras will be the main attraction for the upcoming year until the opera's start. On opening night, Riccardo Muti will conduct the Fenice's orchestra and chorus. An auction is held to sell the tickets. Berendt buys a ticket for \$600 because he feels that he needs to experience the performance in order to end his book appropriately.

While at the opening, Berendt runs into several people that he has interviewed earlier during his stay in Venice. He speaks with Felice Casson, who tells him that the police are not really interested in searching for Enrico Carella because he is not as an important figure as is the mafia. Berendt also speaks with Massimo Donadon, whom he has not seen since 1996 at the Carnival Ball. It turns out that Donadon has recently returned from the Netherlands where he has sold more rat poison for the Dutch. As the orchestra begins to take the stage and tune up, the crowd falls extremely quiet. The first song that the orchestra plays is Beethoven's "Consecration of the House".

Berendt learns the real truth about Ivano Beggio; he is broke. The Beggio family had bought the Palazzo Barbaro in hopes of becoming the next Daniel Curtis. Daniel Curtis had been welcomed with open arms by the Venetians after restoring the palace and taking an interest in the city of Venice. Beggio was not so lucky. The Palazzo Barbaro was once again on the market for \$14 million. Daniel Curtis, the son of Patricia Curtis who once swore to buy the palace back, would sadly be unable to. Daniel Curtis had died at the age of 47 of an aneurysm.

Signor Seguso had died before the reopening of the Fenice and his works of art could not even be displayed. The family has an ongoing dispute over the works of art, and until the dispute is settled, the glassworks will not be as displayed.

Chapter 15, "Open House" Analysis

Chapter 15 closes the true-crime story of the Fenice fire. Although the fire was the focus of nearly the whole book, many other characters were introduced, and Berendt informs the reader of the progress of those individuals before ending the novel. Both Daniel Curtis and Signore Seguso have passed on, Massimo Donadon has sold rat poison to the Dutch, and Ivano Beggio is selling the Palazzo Barbaro once again because his family is broke.



Characters

John Berendt

John Berendt is famous for his other novel, *Midnight in the Garden of Evil*. In both novels, Berendt travels to the location and gives the reader an in-depth look into the land and the situations.

In *The City of Falling Angels*, John is the novel's main character. He narrates the story through his eyes and fills in the real story of Venice as seen while living there. The main story is about a real life incident that occurred in Venice in 1996. The Fenice, a historic opera house in Venice, goes up in flames one night. John Berendt arrives three days after the fire, by sheer coincidence. During his visit to Venice, he decides to take up residence for a few months to study the Venetian citizens. His outlook is that the city of Venice is only part of the story, and that Venetians tell the whole story. It is impossible to know Venice without knowing the Venetians. During his stay, he encounters all kinds of different people who help him to write his book. Most of the people that Berendt encounters are more than willing to talk to him, and some are not.

Berendt does not let the unwillingness of some people to be interviewed stop him. He proceeds to the next source, determined to get the story. He uses his investigative skills to draw his own conclusions about many points, but he also portrays the interviewee's conclusions as well.

Signor Archimede Seguso

Signor Seguso is eighty-six years old. He has white hair and flaring eyebrows. Berendt compares his look to that of a sorcerer, albeit a kind one. Signor Seguso has an animated face and eyes that captivate the eyes of all. His hands are muscular and large in size and his left one is permanently curved as if it is cupping a pole. Indeed, this deformity is a result of his trade, a glassmaker. The Seguso family has been glassmakers since the 14th century, and Signor Seguso takes great pride in his craft. He has been a glassmaker for the past 75 years, and is highly skilled and toned in his craft. This comes into play when after the Fenice fire he spends most of his time at the glassworks creating many new pieces of art based on what he saw in the Fenice fire. Before his death, he creates over 100 pieces of art that reflect his vision of the fire at the Fenice.

Giampaolo Seguso

Giampaolo Seguso is the second son of Archimede and his wife. Giampaolo, however, is not involved with the family in any sense. He is the self-proclaimed black sheep of the family. Giampaolo tries to coerce his family into making modern changes. When his suggestions are met with refusal, he leaves the family business. After leaving the



business, he tries to cash out his one-third ownership of the company, but his father refuses to pay him off.

Unrelenting, Giampaolo tries to have his father declared incompetent so he can sue his brother for the one-third of the company that he owns. This action fails and he is countersued by his family, who wins. Giampaolo is undeterred and opens up his own glassworks shops.

Count Marcello

Count Marcello becomes a friend of Berendt's during Berendt's residence in Venice. Count Marcello is a no-nonsense man who is not afraid to voice his opinions and does so quite often. The greatest example of this is when Count Marcello attends a Save Venice board meeting in New York right after his wife is fired from the board. He demands the president, Bob Guthrie to stand down from the board while criticizing the group as a whole.

Peter Lauritzen

Peter is one of John Berendt's landlords during his stay in Venice. Peter has lived in Venice for thirty years. Originally from Oak Park, Illinois, Peter came to Venice to attend school. After school, Peter never returned back to America to fulfill his father's wishes of becoming a baseball player and a businessman, but instead stayed in Venice after being assigned to work there. Peter is a published author, having written four popular books. The publication of his books has led to him make a living as a lecturer on tours of Italy and England.

Olga Rudge

Olga Rudge is mentioned in name, but is not alive during Berendt's time in Venice. She dies at the age of 101 shortly after Berendt arrives in Venice. She is a character in this book because she had the infamous affair with Ezra Pound, a famous poet. Olga Rudge is also identified in order for Berendt to tell the tale of how Jane and Philip Ryland took advantage of Olga in her elderly years after she began suffering from Alzheimer's.

Ezra Pound

Ezra Pound is a famous poet who lived in Venice with his mistress, Olga Rudge, for the last eleven years of his life. Together, Olga and Ezra had an illegitimate daughter who they later gave up for adoption. The name of their daughter is Mary de Rachewiltz. Pound, who was locked up for quite a few years, maintained his affair with Olga Rudge for over fifty years.



Mary de Rachewiltz

Mary de Rachewiltz is the illegitimate daughter of Olga Rudge and Ezra Pound. She was given up for adoption by her parents, who had hoped that the affair would not get out. Mary then grew up on a farm where she learned manual labor. Olga caught wind of this and refused to let her daughter grow up working on a farm and only occasionally brushing her teeth, so she took her back home to live with her. Mary grew to resent her mother for making her act like a lady when all Mary wanted to do was live the life she had before she was taken away. Mary has an obsessive attitude toward her father; she overly adores him.

Mario Stefani

Mario Stefani is a famous poet in Venice. He is well known and well liked. He dresses oddly, wearing stuff that clashes, but most Venetians just consider it a character quirk. Mario Stefani is an impulsive person who changes his will to someone else's name at the drop of a hat. He has three wills at the time of his suicide, each in a different person's name.

Felice Casson

Felice Casson is a prosecutor who is in charge of prosecuting the Fenice fire. He is young and graying, and has a very stern manner. He seems to take his job very seriously and is willing to share his theories on how the fire started. It is because of Casson that the two electricians charged in the fire are found guilty.



Objects/Places

Venice

Venice is the setting of the story. The real story of Venice lies within the Venetian citizens, some of whom Berendt interviews to discover the real Venice, not just the tourist attraction. Venice is surrounded with mystery and aura, entrapped in maze-like alleyways. It is the history and the future of Venice that is portrayed throughout the novel.

The Fenice Opera House

The Fenice opera house is a historic landmark in Venice. It is the home to many performers throughout the year, every year. It is while the Fenice was under construction that the fire started and destroyed most of the famous opera house. The Fenice is one of Venice's most treasured landmarks.

The Fenice is the subject of most of the novel as Berendt interviews and questions people about the process of the rebuilding. The Fenice comes under many arguments and intense discussion as the city struggles to rebuild the famous opera house.

Haig's Bar

Haig's bar is where people commune during the fire. While only seen and mentioned briefly, it is important because it is the first place that the mafia is mentioned as a cause to the fire. Count Marcello volunteers his opinions freely both inside and outside of Haig's bar.

Palazzo Barbaro

The Palazzo Barbaro is a palace in Venice. It is the most important palace mentioned in the book as several chapters focus on it. The Palazzo Barbaro was owned by the Barbaro family for over 400 years before the family's finances began to decline and the palace faced ruin. It was saved by Daniel Curtis, a Bostonian man who moved to Venice several years after serving prison time in America. He bought the palace and made it his focus to contribute to the city of Venice. The Curtis family owned the palace for over a century before having to sell it.

Guidecca Canal

The Guidecca Canal is a canal that surrounds Venice. It is the primary mode of transportation of water boats. In Venice, there are no motor cars allowed due to



concerns of pollution. The citizens of Venice regularly use the canal to travel from one place to another when walking is not feasible.

The Hidden Nest

The hidden nest is a house that was owned by Olga Rudge and it is where she lived with her partner, a married poet by the name of Ezra Pound. Ezra Pound spent the last eleven years of his life living with Olga in this house. Berendt arranges to rent the house for six weeks. The plans were made with Olga and Pound's illegitimate daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz.

Carnival

Carnival is an age-old tradition among Venetians. It has only recently become revived again after being banned after Napoleon won the battle over Venice. The Carnival lasts for six months, during which all residents dress up in costumes and wear masks to conceal their identity. Berendt uncovers the fact that the Carnival is not taken to the extreme nowadays like it was centuries ago. At the Carnival Ball, many diners take off their masks at dinnertime and most of the guests have dressed in formal black-tie attire instead of in costume.

St. Mark's Square

St. Mark's Square is where Berendt interviews Felice Casson about the sudden change of ruling. In addition, it is where Berendt frequents with Ludovico de Luigi and has lunch or dinner. St. Mark's Square is a popular tourist attraction, famous as a place where tourists can feed pigeons. Tourists buy the bags of corn from the vendors who are stationed all over St. Mark's Square.

Church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli

This 500-year-old church is a small attraction, out of the way and often found by stumbling upon it. Berendt describes it as being "set into a tiny niche at the heart of a maze of streets". A small canal surrounds one side of the church, serving as a reflecting pool. People choose to have their weddings in this church over most others, making the church famous.

"Save Venice"

Save Venice is a foundation that is devoted to saving the buildings and artwork in the city of Venice. It is headed by both Larry Lovett and Bob Guthrie, the two heads that have had a falling out over the past decade. It is the Save Venice foundation that contributes to the rebuilding of the Fenice, allowing the Fenice to be completed.



Themes

Mystery and Aura

Mystery and Aura is a common theme in the city of Venice. The city of Venice is a maze of backdoor alleyways and streets. At night, it seems almost sinister, especially during the months of Carnival. Mystery further surrounds Venice in determining the cause of the Fenice fire. Originally deemed an accident, the cause of the fire is later listed as arson, giving the fire a sense of mystery. Berendt is bewildered when, four months after the investigation is closed, the ruling on the fire is changed.

Mystery surrounds the cause of the fire in the beginning of the novel as well. During the investigation, many suspects were considered as the prosecution struggled to identify the negligent persons behind the incident. Keys were given out to anyone and never kept track of, the custodian on duty miraculously disappeared, and two men were seen running from the Fenice shortly after the fire started.

Venetians versus Tourists

Venetians versus Tourists is a repeated theme throughout the book. While it may not be the most talked about subject matter, it is most definitely a common theme. Berendt in all ways is considered a tourist, not a citizen. In the beginning of the visit, when Berendt is planning to stay and get the real story about Venice, it his landlords fill him in on the real ways to get him noticed as a citizen in order to get the citizen discount. It is widely known that the tourists are extremely overcharged, and that is how the city of Venice is able to flourish.

Strong versus Weak

The strong versus weak theme is a constant in the story. The theme describes how the strong will always overtake the weak. There are two perfect examples in this novel. The first is when Berendt is having lunch with Ludovico de Luigi and a seagull swarms down and pecks the heart out of a weaker bird, the pigeon. Another example is when Jane Ryland takes advantage of the elderly and senile Olga Rudge. Olga Rudge is suffering from Alzheimer's when she meets and befriends Jane Ryland. Ryland has ulterior motives and literally steals hundreds of documents from Olga Rudge. Olga, being elderly and suffering from Alzheimer's, is an easy target.



Style

Point of View

This entire story is told through the eyes of John Berendt as he arrives in and then lives in Venice. John tells the story behind the Fenice: it's past, present, and the hopeful future. During his stay in Venice, he encounters several characters; all real, live people who help tell Venice's story. It is with these encounters that John learns the real nature of the city of Venice; how it helps to unite and divide the citizens of Venice in more ways than one. He learns of the conspiracy behind the fire at the Fenice, and he learns of many different stories that help to unite the entire story of the Fenice opera house.

The story is told in the first person point of view based on Berendt's experiences. His interviews are told as if the reader were sitting right in the room. Since the story is a true-life crime story, Berendt's decision to tell the story in the first person point of view is successful and helps the reader to understand what Berendt is feeling as he is interviewing the characters. In addition, it helps the reader gather an insight into the characters themselves: their actions, movements, and tone of voice. By gathering an insight into the characters, the reader is allowed to feel like he or she is actually interviewing the character.

Setting

The true-crime story begins and ends in Venice shortly after the fire demolishes the Fenice opera house. Among the settings in Venice are Palazzo Barbaro, the Hidden Nest, la Fenice, and various scenes in which Berendt interviews people. Venice, of course, is the major setting, but toward the end, New York is also a setting as Count Marcello attends a board meeting of the foundation "Save Fenice". Berendt travels all over the city of Venice during all hours of the day in order to provide readers with the story of Venice as no tourist has seen.

Palazzo Barbaro is a palace that was owned by the Barbaro family until it suffered financial ruin. It was bought by Daniel Curtis, a Bostonian, and saved. It remained in the Curtis family for over 100 years before being sold to an outsider. The Hidden Nest is the house that Olga Rudge shared with Ezra Pound. It was nicknamed the Hidden Nest by Pound because that is where he spent the last eleven years of his life, living in seclusion. Berendt includes all of these locations in his true-crime novel to show historic importance.

Structure

The story is told in fifteen chapters, each named for a piece of the story. The story is told of the Fenice in past and present. The story focuses not just on the rebuilding of the Fenice, but on the stories of the Venetians as well. Berendt interviews several people

and ties their stories into one. There are mentions of Olga Rudge and Ezra Pound's affair, which resulted in an illegitimate daughter. Mario Stefani, a famous poet, commits suicide, and Berendt shares this story with the readers as well.

The structure of the story is solid as the individual stories all intertwine and connect the story of the Fenice to the story of Venice. It looks forward to the rebuilding of the Fenice as well and closes the book with the current up-to-date information on the Fenice at the time of the close of the book. The fact that the story is told in different chapters with different names does not confuse the reader. The chapters each reflect a different period or different event.

By breaking the chapters up in different periods and events, the reader is allowed to see the break between the different stories. Rather than combine the stories into one long tale, Berendt chooses to separate them to clarify different events. The events all link together, in time and in story.

Quotes

"Everyone in Venice is acting. Everyone plays a role, and the role changes."

"Venetians never tell the truth. We mean precisely the opposite of what we say."

"I was lying when I said that."

"Venice once had twelve opera houses. Now we have none. One more nail in the coffin. Look at it! An empty shell. Just like Venice."

"It's not Napoleon's royal box any longer, nor is it Austria's. It's ours."

"My view is that I belong to a great relay race of Murano glassmakers. In my opinion, the last runner does not exist... And that is one of the major differences between my father and me. My father thinks of himself as the last runner in the race."

"I was struck by the similarity between what happened to your mother and the story in *The Aspern Papers*. Are you familiar with that novel?"

"We've been living with *The Aspern Papers* for forty years."

"Only a person who set the fire would have known that leaving the building an hour before it burst into flame would have put him in the clear."

"We're both going to jail. They've got us. They've really got us."

"Mario had his problems. Perhaps changing wills was his way of solving them."

"To be Venetian and to know how to live in Venice is an art. It is our way of living, so different from the rest of the world...and that is certainly not easy to understand."



Topics for Discussion

Mystery and aura surround the city of Venice. The fire at the opera house helps to contribute to the mystery when arson is suspected as the cause of the fire. Do you think that the investigations into the possible arson were thorough?

What could have been done to investigate more thoroughly the Fenice opera house fire?

Why is it that mystery and aura seems to be a theme associated with Venice?

Why do you suppose that the fire at the Fenice was originally deemed an accident, but later declared arson?

Mario Stefani seemingly exhibited signs that he would commit suicide. Some people think that it was just part of his quirkiness. Do you agree? Explain.

Discuss the signs that indicated Mario Stefani was not happy and wished to die.

Could the feud between Bob Guthrie and Larry Lovett have been avoided?

Was the trial for Enrico Carella and Massimiliano Marchetti adequate? Could more have been done to make sure both men went to jail instead of one who chose to run?