



Bitter & Sweet: The Houses of Torani & Trieste

by S. Lucia Kanter St. Amour for 2027 release. Word count: 90k

In the world of *The Covert Buccaneer*, S. Lucia Kanter St. Amour returns to San Francisco's North Beach with a sweeping historical novel about the women who built the institutions behind American coffee culture.

One-sentence summary: Set against North Beach's evolution from immigrant enclave to cultural landmark, *Bitter & Sweet* is a character-driven historical novel about two extraordinary women—Ezilda Torre of Torani and Ida Giotta of Caffè Trieste—whose lives and legacies unfold through the DeLuca/Benvenuto family across generations, shaping the institutions behind modern American coffee culture.

1925: Ezilda Torre and husband Rinaldo establish a small flavored syrup business in North Beach using family recipes from Lucca, Italy. When Rinaldo dies suddenly in 1938, leaving her alone with two young children, Ezilda assumes control in an era that rarely imagined women at the helm. Through Prohibition, the Depression, wartime sugar shortages, and shifting American tastes, she stabilizes production, builds distribution networks, and protects the brand with discipline and a strategic palate. From a modest storefront supplying neighborhood businesses such as Molinari's Delicatessen and Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store—neighborhood institutions shaken by the wartime roundup of Italian “enemy aliens”—Torani expands, positioning itself for international growth long before flavored coffee becomes a trend. Ezilda lays the groundwork for a multi-generational enterprise that would ultimately grow to 150 flavors, \$500M in annual revenue, and a global presence behind café counters worldwide.

1952: Ida Giotta arrives in San Francisco, having fled Communist Istria after World War II and rebuilt briefly in Trieste before crossing the Atlantic. She and husband Giovanni anchor Caffè Trieste—San Francisco's first espresso café—at the heart of North Beach. While Ida raises three children, the café evolves as a fulcrum of the city's culture, drawing immigrants, artists, Beat writers, firefighters, bankers, and filmmakers. Francis Ford Coppola drafts portions of *The Godfather* at its tables. By the 1990s, the flavored latte revolution—fueled by Torani syrup—moves from novelty to ubiquity. Yet Trieste's staying power rests not only on espresso and atmosphere, but on operational rigor, Ida's social intelligence, and decades of her voice singing opera within its muraled walls. After Giovanni's passing and a decade-long family feud and lawsuit over succession that threatened the café's future, it endures—ultimately remaining in the Giotta family under the leadership of the next generation of women. Known as “Mamma Ida,” she would still be singing at her 101st birthday celebration, just weeks before her death.

Spanning 1925 to 2025, these institutions—built, stabilized, and protected by women—shape North Beach and American coffee culture. As espresso spreads across America and flavored syrups begin appearing behind café counters, the worlds of Torani and Caffè Trieste converge—commercially, culturally, and eventually personally. Yet legacy is fragile. A widow steps into power; a matriarch holds a family together under public lights. When succession turns personal and markets shift, both must decide what they are willing to risk—not merely to grow their enterprises, but to keep them from being torn apart from within.