

Fishing in Foreign Seas

Chapter 2

May 1992

He saw her across the bar-lounge of the Teatro Massimo in Palermo. She was the most incredibly beautiful woman he had ever seen. She was tall – about 5 feet 9, he guessed, with jet black hair down to her waist, but gathered by a blue ribbon at the nape of her neck. She was wearing a white pleated linen dress, belted at the waist to emphasize her slim figure. She was sipping champagne and surveying the crowd around her. He had to meet her, even if he made an idiot of himself because he didn't speak a word of Italian.

“Are you enjoying the opera?” he asked. She turned, slightly, to face him, taking in the immaculate dress white uniform, with the gold and black epaulettes.

“Yes, I am,” she said, in perfect, slightly accented English. “Do you like this opera?”

“Rigoletto is my favorite opera, and when I heard it was playing here tonight, I had to get a ticket.”

“Are you from the American warship in the harbor?” She decided she liked his earnest, sun-tanned face. “A *typical American face*”, she thought, the kind of face she would have expected to see in a magazine with a feature about the latest fashions for men at university.

“Yes, I am. Do you live here in Palermo?”

“Not in Palermo. My family has a villa in the hills southwest of Palermo. And what part of America are you from?”

“I grew up near Philadelphia. Have you been to the States?”

“Yes, but not recently. When I was about fifteen, my family took a trip to America – to New York and California.”

“Well,” he confessed, “here I am on a trip to Europe – all expenses paid – by the US government.” His grin was sweet, she thought.

“And what do you do on this ship of yours? You have no sails to set.”

He laughed, and noticed for the first time that her eyes were large and blue – an intense sparkling blue – set below dark eyebrows. Her skin was lightly tanned, and her mouth, with its soft red coloration was expressive.

“Actually, I'm the chief engineer. We decided, rightly or wrongly, to give up sails, and to burn oil to move us along.”

She eyed the decorations he wore on his left breast: “it must be a very challenging position.”

“Yes, sometimes it is,” he admitted. “Your English is excellent! Where did you learn it?”

She blushed and looked down at her hands. “Thank you. As a child I found languages easy, so I learned quite well in school. Then two, no three, years ago I went to Cambridge, and studied English for six months.”

“But you don't use English every day,” he suggested.

“Some days I do. Besides my own work, I help my father with his business.”

He noticed that she wore a crucifix studded with diamonds around her neck, and that the neckline of her dress was modest. “What is your work? . . . More importantly, what is your name?”

She smiled at him. “I am Caterina Lo Gado. As to my work – well, I teach art at the University of Palermo.”

“I'm Jamie Morrison, and I'm very pleased to meet you!” He offered her his hand, which she took with a smile. Her handshake was warm and firm.

“May I ask about your father’s business?”

“Yes, of course. We have a family wine-making business. Some of the wines we export – to the UK – some even to America!”

The bell for the commencement of the third act was ringing. “That’s very interesting,” he said, and then with more urgency: “Caterina, might we have dinner after the opera?”

“No, I’m afraid not,” she said. She saw the disappointment in his face. “I’m here with my mother, you see. She doesn’t speak English . . . and . . . perhaps we could go for a coffee,” she suggested.

“That would be lovely, Caterina! Shall I meet you here?”

“Yes. See you later,” and she disappeared into the crowd.

Mrs. Lo Gado wore an elaborate beige silk dress and a strand of large pearls. She was considerably shorter than Caterina – a handsome woman with a lined, sun-tanned face. She seemed, however, to be somewhat distracted.

“Pleased to meet you,” she said¹¹.

“I’m very pleased to meet you ma’am,” Jamie said.

“There is a nice patisserie across the street where we can get a coffee,” Caterina offered.

“Mama, I suggest that we go to La Pasticceria di Massaro on Via Aragona.”

“Alright, but let’s make it brief!”

They crossed Piazza Verdi, walked down Via Aragona and before reaching Piazza Olivia they came to Pasticceria di Massaro, a small establishment the window of which displayed tiers of baked goods: cakes, biscuits, breads in assorted shapes and sizes, and many varieties of biscuits. Caterina took a small table, and Jamie pulled out a chair for her mother.

“Thank you,” she said with a strong nod of her head and a brief smile at Jamie.

He paused, looking toward the counter. “I see that they have ice cream.”

“Of course!” Caterina said. “Sicilian gelato is the best there is, and they make it very well here. You prefer it to a coffee?”

“I think I’ll compromise on a coffee ice cream . . . no: ‘gelato’!”

“You, Mama?”

“I’ll have a long espresso and an almond biscuit.”

Caterina gave their order to a waitress in a black uniform dress and a small white apron. Jamie looked about. The paneled walls were covered with black and white photographs of what appeared to be celebrities. Behind the counter three young men in black T-shirts, trousers and aprons were busy filling orders.

“How does one get one’s picture on the wall?” he inquired of Caterina.

“Oh, it’s not so hard. There’s a photo of my father and grandfather over there.” She pointed across the room.

“Can you show me?”

“He wants to see the photo of Papa and Nonno,” she explained to her mother, as she got up from the table. Mrs Lo Gado nodded approvingly.

“You see,” said Caterina, pointing to a photo of three men sitting at a table at Massaro’s with espresso cups in front of them.

“This must be your grandfather,” he said, indicating a large man with a formidable face, graying hair and large, black mustache. She nodded.

¹¹ Text in the monotype corsiva font are spoken, or thought, in Italian

He looked at her, comparing her features with the other two faces in the photo.

“And this must be your father,” he said. He indicated a younger, tall and rather handsome man seated on the right of the grandfather.

“Yes, that is he.”

“And who is this other fellow here?” He indicated the man to the grandfather’s left.

“Oh, that’s Mr Massaro.” She looked around. “He’s not here tonight. Probably he is at the bakery.”

“When was the picture taken?”

“It must be about fifteen years old. My grandfather is dead now.”

“I’m sorry. I would like to have met him. He looks like quite a formidable man.”

She smiled ruefully. “He was.” She thought for a moment. “He was a sort of benevolent dictator. My mother’s father. The great planter of vines!”

When they returned to the table, they found that their orders had arrived.

“*He said Nonno looked formidable*,” Caterina explained to her mother.

“*Yes, but you should explain to the gentleman that you were always his favorite.*”

“Mama says I should tell you that I was his favorite.” She said quietly. She looked at her hands in her lap.

“I can understand why!”

Caterina blushed pink. Her mother looked from one to the other, then pursed her lips disapprovingly.

“This gelato is definitely the best coffee ice cream I’ve ever had,” Jamie said.

“*He says it’s the best gelato he’s had.*”

“*Of course,*” said her mother.

“How did you get into the Navy, Jamie?”

“I had a scholarship to go to university which was paid for by the Navy, and on graduation I was commissioned an officer with an obligation to serve for three years.”

“What university was that?” Caterina inquired.

“I went to Yale”

“And what did you study there?”

“Well, when I was studying - which probably – looking back – wasn’t often enough, I studied physics.”

“Did you have some chances to do some sports?”

“Oh yes, lots of chances, but I’m not much of an athlete. I tried out for the university soccer team – oh, that’s right, you call it football - but I wasn’t good enough, so I played for my college team. I’m a mediocre tennis player and a slightly better than average squash player.”

“*Mama, he went to Yale University and graduated with a degree in physics.*”

“*I see,*” said Mrs. Lo Gado. She raised her chin and studied Jamie for a moment.

Jamie and Caterina sat looking at each other for a long moment. Then they both smiled.

“So your family has been making wine for some time,” he observed.

“Yes, but the winery has changed very much since grandfather’s time. Then the emphasis was on volume table wine. My father and my brother have decided to reduce the output to produce only

very good wines. I think the strategy is working because we have won some awards and the good importers in the UK and America have taken notice.”

Her eyes sparkled with pride. Her cheeks were tinged pink with her enthusiasm. “*She is so beautiful*”, he thought.

“And your role is to deal with the importers?”

“Not officially. My work at the university prevents it. My father’s English is not so good, and my brother is only a little better. I am called on sometimes to accompany English speaking visitors to the winery, when my schedule permits. I do wine tastings for them.”

“Are you . . . how do you say . . . a sommelier?”

“No. I only know our wines and some competing wines in Sicily.”

“*Caterina, we must go*”, said Mrs Lo Gado.

“*Yes, Mama. In a moment.*” She looked at Jamie. ‘He is a handsome man,’ she thought. ‘Not Italian in appearance, but still very good looking.’

Jamie bit his lip. “Caterina, might we have lunch together tomorrow?”

She thought for a moment. “Yes, that is possible. I have classes at the hours of 9, 10:30 and 4:30 tomorrow.”

“Can you suggest a restaurant where we can meet?”

She squinted here eyes in thought. “There is Cin Cin on Via Manin. It has excellent Sicilian food. If we get there at about 1 o’clock, we should be able to get a table.”

“Excellent!” He was beaming with happiness. “Let me go and pay the bill.” he said, rising from the table.

“*No, no!*” Mrs Lo Gado said sternly. “*You are a visitor to Sicily and you are our guest!*”

Caterina nodded: “You are a visitor and our guest.”

“OK, but I’m buying the lunch tomorrow.”

The bill was paid and they moved to depart.

“Good bye, Mrs Lo Gado,” he said, offering her his hand, which she took.

“*Arrivaderci, Caterina. At one tomorrow.*”

“*Arrivaderci, Jamie. At one,*” she said and followed her mother out of the patisserie.

“*I don’t see why you have to go fishing in foreign seas, Caterina*”, Mrs. Lo Gado said.

“*I’m not ‘fishing’, I’m just being hospitable to a foreigner who is interested in Sicily.*”

“*Humph,*” said Mrs Lo Gado. Jamie heard but did not understand the exchange.

At 12:45 the next day, Jamie was standing outside Cin Cin. He had already inquired of the matré’d regarding a table for two, and has been assured, in barely understandable English, that one would be available. He had glanced at the menu (which was entirely in Italian), so he was able to assure himself only that it was expensive. “*She is worth it!*” he told himself. The white walls of the restaurant were decorated with what appeared to be original paintings, some in oils, and others in watercolor. The tables were covered with white tablecloths, and each table had a small vase of fresh flowers. He was dressed in his white summer uniform: short sleeve shirt, with epaulettes, white trousers, white shoes, and white officer’s hat. As he stood on the pavement waiting, he noticed that he attracted more than passing attention from the noon-time passers-by. He, in turn, viewed each of them with interest. There were business men, in pairs,

talking earnestly, as they hurried to an appointment. Teenage girls in groups, giggling with each other and talking on their cell phones. Wealthy women ambled by, laden down with shopping bags. Then there were the poor, many of them looked like immigrants – or refugees – from North Africa, by their darker skin. They were not as purposeful in their strides, and looked about, as if seeking opportunities. One or two seemed ready to approach him – out of curiosity, or to ask for a handout – but as they realised he was a foreign military officer, clearly waiting for someone, they thought better of it.

He saw her approaching a block away to his right. She was wearing a pale blue cotton blouse, short-sleeved, and a dark blue cotton skirt of India block print, which came down below her knees. She had on a pair of leather sandals, and her hair was tied behind her as it had been the previous evening.

“Hello,” she said, “Have you been waiting long?”

“No, I’ve been people-watching. I got here early to make sure we’ll have a table.”

She led the way inside. “*Good day, Carmelo. You have a table for us?*”

“*Yes, Miss. Just over here by the window,*” said the matre’d, eyeing Jamie somewhat more respectfully.

They seated themselves at the table.

“How were your classes this morning,” he asked.

“Well much as they always are. Some students have talent and are a pleasure to work with. And others . . . how do you say? . . . ‘just don’t get it’?”

He laughed. “What is it, exactly, that you teach?”

“I teach painting and drawing, at intermediate level. We mostly work on still life, but toward the end of the course, we begin to work on the human figure. And this year I’ve started teaching a beginning level course on Renaissance Italian art history.”

“You must be an accomplished artist yourself,” he guessed.

She smiled shyly. “Not really. When I get a chance, I like to paint landscapes in water colors.”

“Is any of your work on display here?” he asked, looking around

She laughed aloud. “Oh no! These are all works by commercial painters, and they’re all for sale.”

The waiter came with the menus. “*What will you like to drink?*” he asked.

“Do you like still or sparkling water? Shall we have wine?” she queried.

“I like the San Pellegrino water, and by all means, let’s have some wine. Would they have some of your family’s wine?”

“I think so.” She turned to the waiter and gave the order.

“What do you like to eat?” she asked.

“Oh, I’m very fond of Italian food . . . I’d like some pasta as some point.”

“A Sicilian specialty they have here is *pasta con le sarde*; spaghetti with sardines.”

“Umm . . . I’m not really that fond of sardines,” he confessed.

“Do you like clams? Or a large fish?”

“Yes, I love clams, and a larger fish would be excellent. I suppose it’s all the bones in sardines which put me off.”

“Ah, for that you have to be sort of a surgeon,” she said with a mischievous smile. “Shall I order for us?”

“Yes, please do,” he said.

The waiter came with a bottle of San Pellegrino, a bottle of white wine, and a basket of bread.

“Here is the Luna Cometa 1989, Miss. Will you taste it?”

She did and nodded her approval.

Jamie took a sip, and contemplated it. “It’s lovely. It has class and character.”

‘Like her,’ he thought, ‘she’s obviously a very classy young woman – beyond my reach?’.

“It is made from Fiano grape, which is a typical Sicilian grape, and like most Sicilian wines, it speaks out.”

She gave their food order to the waiter, then she sat looking at him for a moment.

“What do the two gold bars on your shoulders signify?” she asked.

“They identify me as a full lieutenant in the Navy. That’s the same rank as a captain in the army.”

“And the ribbons on your shirt – they are awards?”

He became suddenly serious and looked down at the table cloth.

“This one,” he said, “is for service during the Gulf War last year.” He paused.

“And the dark blue one next to it?” she asked.

“It’s the . . . it’s the Purple Heart. It’s for injuries sustained in the war.”

She suddenly looked shocked. “You were hurt last year in the war?”

He said nothing, but held up his left hand. She saw, suddenly, that it was twisted and disfigured. She stared at it in horror.

He smiled; even his eyes were laughing. “Fortunately, I’m right-handed, and I can use this old thing for most things, except writing and playing the piano.”

“How did it happen?” She leaned forward, her eyes intent on him.

“I was on a minesweeper assigned to clear mines from the Shatt al Arab waterway. We were attacked at 2:30 in the morning by three Iraqi motor gun boats. A shell exploded on my ship, and I was hit with some of the shrapnel.”

“What is ‘shrapnel’?” she asked.

“Shrapnel is the flying pieces of metal shell casing.”

“*La Madonna!*” she exclaimed. “You were lucky it just hit your hand!”

“Unfortunately, I wasn’t so lucky. I took two other pieces here (gesturing to his left side), and here (gesturing to his left thigh).”

She stared at him. There were tears welling up in her eyes.

“And the last ribbon,” she asked, then very softly: “What is it for?”

He assumed a jaunty air. “Well it’s kind of a good conduct award.”

“No it isn’t,” she retorted, “what’s it for!”

He took a deep breath and looked down at the table. “It’s called the Navy Cross. . . . When those three motor gun boats started shelling us, we were completely unprepared. We had thought that the Shatt al Arab was totally clear of enemy warships. They came out of nowhere. The first shell landed on the bridge, killing the captain, the quartermaster of the watch and one of the lookouts. We went to general quarters¹², the heavy machine gun we had on the ship’s bow was manned, and we started returning fire. The Iraqis were either very lucky or very good because the second shell burst above the machine gun and killed the crew.” He paused. “I had been in the engine room at the time, and when I got on deck things were a real shambles. There was one gun boat about 300 yards away calling out ‘Surrender!’ ‘Surrender!’ in English. I got to the machine gun. I was no gunner, but I had watched the crew firing it during exercises. I started

¹² General quarters = the state of maximum battle readiness

firing at the nearest gun boat. Another shell went off somewhere nearby. That was probably the one that hit me. I knew I had to keep going. I fired at the other two until I ran out of ammunition. Then I went up to the radio room, and told the operator to call for air support. I went onto what was left of the bridge. Two of the gun boats were high-tailing it. They had heard the F-18's¹³ coming. The third – the one I'd shot at initially - was dead in the water. We got the gun reloaded, but it wouldn't fire. The remaining crew all armed themselves with M-16's, and we approached the one MGB. We got the Iraqi crew to surrender; I passed out. I woke up in the sick bay of the Marine troop ship." He paused again.

Caterina reached across the table and clasped his left hand. "*La Madonna!*" she whispered and shook her head. "What was done about your injuries?"

"I was flown to the States and spent a while in Bethesda Naval Hospital. Mostly, they worked on this, indicating his left hand. But I lost a kidney. The rest of me has healed very well."

She sat in silence gazing at him. He sipped his wine and smiled wistfully at her. She was fingering the tiny crucifix. Their first courses arrived.

"This looks really good," he said, putting a fork into the pile of spaghetti surrounded with small clams. "What do you have?" he asked.

"It's called 'caponata'. Caponata is a Sicilian dish, with tomatoes and aubergine¹⁴. This one is made with the addition of octopus, capers and toasted almonds. You want to try it?" She presented him with a forkful.

"Humh," he said savoring it. "That really is surprisingly good. I mean, I can taste the octopus, and they're actually good."

She laughed. "I remember the first time I had cheeseburger with onions and ketchup. It was during that trip to New York that I mentioned to you. I had never seen one before, and I thought it looked . . . how do you say? . . . 'gross'. But I found that I actually liked it - not as much as caponata, though." He smiled, and they ate in companionable silence until the main dish arrived.

The waiter brought a platter heaping with salt and obviously very hot.

"It is sea fish baked in salt," Caterina explained. The waiter set about exposing the fish and removing its flesh. He placed the plates of boned fish in front of them, disappeared briefly, and returned with two salads.

"This is really excellent," Jamie told her, "and your wine is perfect with it!" He saluted her with his wine glass. She held up her glass and touched his.

She looked reflective. "Tell me," she said, "about you as a person. I mean I know that you are educated, and bright, and brave. What else can you tell me?"

"Well, I like logical things and I like challenges. I'm not very good at languages; after three years of study, I can barely understand Spanish. I'm good at mechanical things and numbers. I like people in small quantities – one-on-one – is my preferred approach. I think I'm pretty optimistic and not easily discouraged."

"My mother told me that when I like a man should try to understand his vulnerabilities as well as his strengths."

"Oh, well," he said with mock seriousness, "I have no vulnerabilities!"

They both laughed.

¹³ A US Navy fighter jet

¹⁴ aubergine = eggplant

“I suppose one of my weaknesses is focusing too much on what really interests me. I’ll get started on some project and not only lose some of my perspective about the project itself, but I’ll neglect other things that I really should be paying attention to. I suppose the good side of this bad trait is that I have a reputation for making things happen. . . . Maybe women are better at keeping a broader focus than men. In the States they say that women are better at ‘multi-tasking’ than men. . . . Also, I tend to be somewhat impatient.”

“Well, I’m a Capricorn,” she said, “Capricorns tend to be somewhat determined.”

“You mean, you know what you want?”

“Yes.” She looked up, smiling.

“Well, there’s nothing wrong with that! I’m a Leo, and they certainly know what they want!”

“And what is it that you want?” she asked, looking away coyly.

“You!” was his immediate thought.

Instead, he said, “I haven’t got a girl friend. I’d like to find a girl I care about and who’d care about me.”

She sat looking at the tablecloth and nodding. She leaned forward, slightly. The movement caught his attention, and he looked at her chest. “*She has got a chest,*” he thought, “*well hidden, but it’s there.*”

She looked up, suddenly resolute. “I imagine it would be difficult to have a good family life when one is in the Navy. I suppose one is at sea much of the time.”

“The Navy is a temporary love of mine. She doesn’t know it, but I am fickle. When I find the right woman, I will leave the Navy.”

She sat smiling faintly, and nodding at the table cloth. “Are you ready for a sweet?” she asked.

“Yes.”

He asked for a tiramisu; she ordered a pistachio and cinnamon semifreddo¹⁵. They finished the wine, and sat sipping their espressos, looking out the window at the throngs of people passing by. He looked at his watch. “What time do you have to be back at the University?”

“I still have an hour and half. Would you like me to show you some of Palermo?”

“Yes, I’d like that very much.”

Outside the restaurant, he took her hand. “You lead the way,” he said. He noticed that when they had to separate because of pedestrian traffic, she reached again for his hand.

“This is the *duomo* or cathedral of Palermo,” she said. They had entered a large open courtyard with the cathedral standing at the far side of the courtyard, away from the street. “It was re-built in stages from 1072 to 1185,” she continued. “Historians believe that there has been a place of worship on this site for many centuries. Probably, there was a Byzantine Greek church here at one time. When the Arabs conquered Sicily in 831, they turned it into a mosque. Then when the Normans came in 1072 they began to make the church you see today. It’s quite grand, but the architecture is not consistent. Don’t you agree?” Her eyes were sparkling with her enthusiasm.

“Caterina, where did you get your eyes? They’re so blue!” he said.

She frowned and put her hands on her hips: “What do my eyes have to do with this cathedral?”

“Well, nothing,” he said ruefully, “I’m enjoying your commentary – I really am. It’s just that I got distracted. I’ve been meaning so ask you for some time.”

¹⁵ A chilled, flavoured Sicilian custard

She relented at his apologetic expression. “My grandfather had blue eyes. The one in the picture. We call them ‘Norman eyes’ because many of the Norman invaders had blue eyes. . . . Now pay attention,” she added with mock severity.

“Yes, Ma’am,” he said, feigning contrition.

They passed through the huge wooden doors of the cathedral onto to cool, dimly-lit interior.

“I’m going to pray for a few minutes,” she said, and she knelt in one of the back pews. Jamie stared up at the massive stone pillars and the distant vaulted ceiling. The walls and ceiling were covered with religious mosaics, many of them decorated in gold leaf. ‘This has been here almost a thousand years,’ he thought. ‘It was here four centuries before Columbus discovered America!’ he said to himself in amazement. He began to look in each of the small chapels that were connected to the nave. Each one seemed to have a story to tell about a favored saint, or some nearly forgotten event. ‘An event or a saint I never even heard of!’ he thought.

Caterina took his arm. “Shall we go on?” she asked.

As they were walking along the Via Marqueda, she asked him, “Do you believe in God?”

“Yes I do, and I was raised in the Catholic Church. I’ve even been confirmed. But somehow I’ve lost touch with my commitment. In the Navy, the Sunday services are very informal and non-denominational. I’m sure, though, that it was God’s intervention which kept me alive in the Shatt al Arab, and when I do pray, I feel more at peace. Sometimes, I feel that I can even sense God’s guidance. Does that make sense?”

“Yes it does.” She squeezed his hand. “For me, God is very real. I feel as if I have known Him all my life. He is a part of who I am. Perhaps it is the result of my upbringing: the Church, Jesus and Mary were always there, from the time I was a small child. I don’t think about it or question it. For me, there is nothing to question.”

“I understand, and I wish I could be like that,” he said. “What about all the rules of the Church: no female priests, no married priests, no birth control, and so on?”

She laughed. “These are rules made up by silly men who believe they are doing God’s service. They are not God’s rules. I believe that if I am faced with a moral question, and I pray to the Virgin for guidance, she will show me the way. . . Does that make sense?”

“It certainly does to me,” he replied.

A few minutes later they arrived at Quattro Canti, the octagonal square at the intersection of Via Marqueda with Vittorio Emanuele. “Look at the buildings on the four corners here,” she said. “They mark the center of the old city and date back to the Baroque period – about the beginning of the seventeenth century. Notice how the facades exactly match one another and how each has its own fountain.”

“Nearly four hundred years!” Jamie mused, “and they’re still so beautiful.” He looked from one corner of the square to another. “For me,” he said, “this is really beautiful architecture, and not towers of tinted glass and stainless steel.”

They walked on through Palermo. Looking down the narrow side streets he could see crumbling buildings, men loitering at street corners, and small children in dirty clothes playing on the pavement. “That, unfortunately, is the other side of Palermo,” she said. “It is dirty, poor, and overrun with immigrants. It is getting worse. Each new government promises improvements, but we slide further into decay. What can our future be?”

They arrived at the entrance to a winding street with market stalls packed in on either side, leaving only a narrow passage, which was thronged with people and motorbikes. “Here we are at Vucciria Market. Does it remind you of a market in North Africa? This, too, is part of our heritage. Here you can buy meat, fish, vegetables, fruit, spices, clothing, tools, children’s toys, CD’s, DVD’s – most anything, but you must bargain for it!”

Jamie stayed close to Caterina. He felt like a cork in a rough sea as they were jostled by people on every side. She, however, remained unconcerned, pointing out to him a particular display of spices, or live chickens, or gold jewelry. He could barely hear her above the din of people shouting and bargaining. His senses were almost overwhelmed by the many aromas: sweets, sweat, spices, rotting vegetables, perfume . . . and there was the kaleidoscope of images: clothing, faces, displays – all seemed to be in motion. When they reached the end, she said: “‘*Vucciria*’ in Italian means ‘clamor’. It is well named! How did you like it? Do you wish for the same in America?”

“I’m absolutely overwhelmed!” he said, looking a bit dazed. She smiled indulgently, and was walking close enough that he could smell her perfume. They strolled on to the harbor and sat down on a bench.

“Jamie, I must go soon. . . . I want you to know that I’ve had a lovely afternoon, and I’ve enjoyed your company very much.”

He gazed at her. “Caterina, I . . . I really can’t recall a day I’ve enjoyed more . . . except, maybe . . . my fifth birthday party.”

“What happened then?” she asked with interest.

“I don’t know. . . . I was just being silly. . . . But seriously, for a minute. I have the duty tomorrow, and I have to be aboard the ship all day. But perhaps you would like to come to the ship for dinner?” She pursed her lips. He thought quickly. “Perhaps your father would like to come with you. It’s perfectly all right . . . many times when we’re in harbor, someone will invite family or friends for dinner. Besides, I can give you a tour of the ship.”

“I think Papa would enjoy it,” she said thoughtfully. “But even if he can’t, I will,” with sudden conviction. “My last class tomorrow ends at 5:30.”

“Excellent! If you and your father can be over there on the mole at 6, one of our boats will pick you up and take you out to the ship where she’s anchored.”

She stood up and smoothed her skirt. She thought, ‘*I like him a lot. He is kind and warm and handsome.*’ He was about to offer her his hand when she stepped close to him and kissed him on each cheek.

“Tomorrow at six,” she said, and turned to go.

“Oh, and Caterina, could you wear a pair of trousers tomorrow.”

She frowned: “Why should I wear trousers?”

Because if we’re going to tour the ship it means going up and down some open ladders, and there are lots of men on the ship . . .”

She smiled and shook her head, as if to say: ‘men are all alike.’

“Tomorrow at six with trousers!” and she strode away.

“Miss Lo Gado?” The young Navy officer had come up onto the mole, which provided a shelter to Palermo’s inner harbor, and was approaching her.

“Yes.”

“I am Ensign Parker, and I have been asked to take you to the Barry.” He was very young, she thought – about 19?

“Pleased to meet you, Ensign Parker. This is my father.”

“Good evening, Mr. Lo Gado,” and the two men shoot hands.

“*It’s a pleasure,*” said her father, who, like her mother, had a tanned, handsome face. His black hair was streaked with grey, as was his full, bushy mustache.

Caterina and her father followed Parker across the mole, and down a flight of steps to a stone landing, where a boat was waiting.

“Make yourselves comfortable,” Parker said. “We will leave in just a moment.” He went back up the stone steps and called out: “Anyone else for the Barry?”

Four sailors in their white uniforms followed the officer down the steps. They had obviously been enjoying Palermo, as they were supporting each other and almost shouting among themselves.

“Great town, Palermo!” said one.

“I had a good one!” said another.

“No, man, she was ugly,” said the third. “You was drinking all that wine, so’s you couldn’t see straight.”

“No, man, she was better looking than yours!” said the second.

They seated themselves clumsily in the boat, and surveyed the other passengers. Caterina was wearing a light blue silk blouse and navy blue, loose-fitting trousers. She had a grey wool pashmina over her shoulders. Her father wore a white open-neck shirt, tan canvas trousers and a canvas jacket of the same material. They were obviously Italian, but not government or military officials.

One of the sailors nudged his mate and looked meaningfully at the pair.

“She’s a real looker!” said the mate. “How come they didn’t have none like that where we was?”

“I speak English,” Caterina announced.

The sailors suddenly fell silent and surveyed the horizon.

The boat was underway, with the coxswain in his white sailor’s uniform and black tie standing on the stern and holding the tiller. Ensign Parker stood just in front and below him, looking ahead. Caterina turned and saw the silhouette of the Barry ahead. Its rail was decorated with a long string of white lights and another long string ran up and over the mast and funnels from the bow to the stern.

The coxswain brought the boat alongside a temporary platform with stairs reaching up to the main deck. Caterina, followed by her father, stepped out onto the platform, and climbed up the stairs. Jamie was waiting for them. “Good evening, Caterina!”

She kissed him on both cheeks. “Good evening, Jamie. This is my father.”

“Good evening, Mr. Lo Gado.”

“*It’s a pleasure.*”

Jamie escorted them up the main deck, through a water-tight door, along a passage and into the wardroom. “This is where the officers eat, where the captain can brief us, and where we can relax when we’re off duty,” he explained. At the center of the space was a large wood and steel table which was bolted to the deck. It was surrounded with chairs, each of which was upholstered with the same fabric which was hung as curtains around the walls. The steel deck was covered with brown fiber carpeting. Around one end and down one side of the space was a built-in, beige leather seating area. The space was air conditioned. A Philippino steward in white jacket and trousers came in.

“Would you like some coffee before we begin our tour?” Jamie asked.

“Yes, thank you very kindly,” said Mr. Lo Gado. Caterina nodded

“I’m sorry we don’t have espresso on offer – it’s just US Navy coffee. Also, we have no wine or whiskey on board. I’m afraid it’s part of a long-standing US Navy tradition.”

“Is quite OK,” Mr. Lo Gado offered.

“I’d like to tell you a little bit about this ship. She is called the Barry, named after Captain John Barry, a Navy hero at the time of the American Revolution. She is a guided missile destroyer, and her primary duty is to screen an aircraft carrier against air or submarine attack.”

The steward brought the coffee in white ceramic mugs, each of which bore the ship’s crest: ‘Strength and Diversity’.

“Currently, we are assigned to the USS George Washington, a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, which is in Naples at the moment. This ship was built in Mississippi in 1989. She has a fully-loaded displacement of 8,300 tons, and is about 150 meters long, with a draft of about 9 meters. Our crew consists of 21 officers and just over 300 enlisted men.”

“What is ‘enlisted men’?” queried Mr. Lo Gado.

“*It means a sailor, not an officer, Papa*”, Caterina explained.

“The ship is powered by four gas turbines and has twin screws,” Jamie continued.

“How fast it goes?” asked Mr. Lo Gado.

“Our top speed is actually classified, but she can do better than 30 knots,” Jamie replied.

“What means ‘classified’?”

“*It means it is secret, Papa.*”

“Would you like to take a tour of the ship?” Jamie inquired.

“Certainly, please,” said Mr. Lo Gado.

Jamie led them out onto the main deck and forward to a gun enclosure.

“This is our five inch gun – that’s 12.7 centimeters. It is fully automatic, is completely computer controlled, and directed by a fire-control radar. It is used against highly maneuverability surface and air targets. It can fire one round every 3 or four seconds. We can select, with a push of a button, which of six types of ammunition it will fire from armor-piercing to high-fragmentation. It has a range of nearly 15 miles, and its shells weigh about 22 kilograms.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Lo Gado. “And you have other weapons also?”

“Yes, we do.” He led them up several ladders to the bridge.

Mr. Lo Gado surveyed the wheel and the engine telegraph. “You drive ship here?” he asked.

“Sometimes, when I’m on watch,” he responded.

They went down a ladder, and Jamie opened a door, which led into a large, darkened space. As their eyes became accustomed to the gloom, they saw that it was packed with electronic consoles and displays, but was otherwise deserted.

“When we’re at general quarters there are three officers and twelve crew in here. It’s called the Combat Information Center. In here, all the information is generated for us, subject to the captain’s orders, to successfully fight several enemies simultaneously, in the air, on the surface or under the surface, all the while in coordination with the other ships in the carrier battle group.”

Caterina stared around her in wonder; Mr. Lo Gado seemed at a loss for words.

They continued aft along the main deck until they reached a gun barrel protruding from a steel casing and pointing out to sea. “This is our close-in weapons system,” Jamie said. “It protects us against anti-ship weapons which have been fired at us. It has its own radar and computer control. It will fire seventy-five, 20 mm projectiles a second, with an effective range of about a mile. The

projectiles are made of tungsten and are intended to destroy an incoming missile before it can reach us.

“Did you say seventy-five a *second*?” Caterina asked.

“Yes, that’s right.”

Walking further aft, they came to the torpedo tubes. “These are our primary weapon against submarines. When a hostile submarine is detected, a torpedo is launched. It will begin a pre-set search pattern, listening for the submarine passively, or actively searching with its sonar.”

“What is ‘sonar’?” Mr. Lo Gado asked.

“It’s like radar,” Jamie responded, “pointing up to the rotating antenna on the mast, “but it sends out sound energy and listens for the reflected sound to find the target. Bats use sonar.”

“Ah, yes.”

“These torpedoes are difficult to fool with countermeasures; they have a maximum underwater speed of over 80 kilometers per hour, and a range of about 10 kilometers. They can pick up a target at a distance of about one and a half kilometers, and they have a warhead with forty kilograms of high explosive.”

“*Madonna!*” exclaimed Caterina.

Approaching the aft end of the main deck they arrived at an open space with what appeared to be closed doors in the deck. “This is our vertical missile launch system. We can carry a mixture of sixteen missiles: Sea Sparrow, surface to air missiles, Harpoon, anti ship missiles, and Tomahawk cruise missiles. They are launched vertically from the cells below these doors. Once they are in the air, their guidance system takes over.”

“You have atom bombs?” Mr. Lo Gado queried.

“I’m sorry, I can’t comment on that, sir.”

“*It probably means that they do,*” Caterina whispered to her father.

At the after end of the main deck they overlooked an open area on the ship’s stern. “This,” Jamie explained, “is our flight deck. We don’t actually carry any aircraft, but anti-submarine warfare helicopters, launched from the carrier, can land here to be re-armed and refueled.”

As they walked forward again along the main deck, they passed an open hatch from which came the sound of machinery. Peering down, Caterina saw a ladder extending down, almost vertically deep into the ship, and, at the bottom of it, what appeared to be large machines.

“That’s our main engine room” Jamie explained. “It’s pretty quiet now. What you’re hearing is the sound of the ship’s service generator running. It supplies electric power to the ship when we’re at anchor. I don’t really think you want to go down there. The ladder’s very steep. It’s hot and it could be a bit dirty down there.”

“How many horsepower you have?”

“Over one hundred thousand, sir.”

Caterina and her father had an exchange in Italian.

“He says your fuel bills must be terrible,” she explained. “Actually, he’s always complaining about the fuel bills for his boat.”

“What kind of a boat does he have?”

“A sixteen meter sloop with a small diesel engine.”

“That must be wonderful!” Jamie looked at Mr. Lo Gado in admiration.

“You like sail boats?” Mr. Lo Gado asked.

“Yes, sir, I do. I used to sail a sixteen *foot* boat when I was young.”

Returning to the wardroom, they found that dinner was about to be served. The table was laid with a white cloth and stainless steel cutlery. Jamie stood at the foot of the table, seating Caterina on his right, and her father on his left. Three other junior officers, including Ensign Parker were introduced and seated themselves at the table.

“The head of the table,” Jamie explained, gesturing to the far end of the table, “is reserved to the captain. But the officer of the day is permitted to pretend his importance by sitting here.”

The steward served each of them with a large glass of tomato juice with lemon. This was followed by sirloin steaks, baked potatoes and a mixed green salad.

“Is your steak alright for you?” Jamie asked his guests.

Caterina said, “Yes”; her father said “Very good.”

“After dinner, we have a choice of a film or, possibly, bridge,” Jamie announced.

“Oh, my father *loves* bridge. He plays in a league once a week. And I play a little.”

“George, did you hear that?” Jamie asked Ensign Parker. “You may be pressed into service.”

“Excellent! I’m ready.”

After the main course, the steward served vanilla ice cream, a pitcher of chocolate sauce and a tray of cookies. This, in turn was followed by coffee.

Caterina said: “Do you always eat like this? I’d be so fat I wouldn’t be able to get out the door if I ate here every day.”

“Ah, but these are young men, Cati,” her father volunteered.

After dinner the table was cleared, and George Parker produced two decks of cards.

“Caterina, why don’t you and I take on George and your father?”

The disposition of players having been agreed, Caterina reminded her father of the English names of the suits: “Spades”, “Hearts”, “Diamonds”, “Clubs”, she said.

“I play the Blackwood Convention¹⁶,” George told Mr. Lo Gado.

“OK.”

The cards were cut and George dealt. They studied their hands.

The bidding proceeded and Jamie won a contract at three no trump, which George doubled. George and Mr. Lo Gado succeeded in winning three club tricks and a heart trick.

“Down one, doubled,” George announced.

“Damn!” Jamie said. “George, how did you know to lead that damned club?”

“Well, Mr. Lo Gado led them, so I guessed he had a few. Caterina had only two little ones. I had two to the queen. I figured you had four clubs, at most – otherwise you would have bid them, and I figured you for the ace-jack, and Mr. Lo Gado for the king and at least four more. If you’d had the ace-king, you would have bid them.”

Jamie shook his head and smiled ruefully. “Sorry, Caterina!”

“There was nothing you could do about that,” she replied, sympathetically.

Mr. Lo Gado looked at George with new respect: “Very good, young man!”

A sailor came into the wardroom with a clipboard: “Latest messages, Mr. Morrison.”

¹⁶ Blackwood is a bridge bidding convention which is designed to convey additional information to one’s partner by the level, sequence and suits one bids.

“Excuse me for a minute,” Jamie said, and he briefly perused the messages on the board, one-by-one, initialing each one. He extracted a message from the clipboard.

“Charlie, would you mind breaking this one?” he asked one of the junior officers who was sitting on the couch, reading a magazine. Caterina glanced at the message, which was printed in black ink on yellow paper. Curiously, it appeared to be nonsense: it was all five character groups, none of which was a recognizable word.

Charlie stood up, put down his magazine. “Sure, Jamie”. He took the message and disappeared.

“What it means ‘breaking’?” asked Mr. Lo Gado.

“It means ‘decoding’,” said Jamie.

“*It’s a secret message, Papa,*” Caterina added.

“Ah.”

The bridge play resumed. George bid and made six clubs. Caterina made a three hearts bid. Mr. Lo Gado bid and made four spades.

“Rubber!” George announced.

Charlie came back in the wardroom. “It’s a routine situation report,” he told Jamie. “I put it on the old man’s clipboard.”

“Thanks, Charlie”

“Who is the ‘old man’?” Caterina inquired.

“It’s the Navy name for the captain. He’s actually only thirty-eight, but he’s at least ten years older than any of us,” Jamie explained.

Play resumed again, and this time Caterina made five diamonds.

Jamie was enthusiastic: “Now we’ve got them on the run!”

Another sailor came in: “Mr. Morrison, the petty officer of the watch would like you to come out to the quarterdeck. There’s a boat acting strangely out here.”

Jamie put down his cards and followed the sailor; the rest of the wardroom’s occupants followed him.

“There, sir,” said the petty officer, pointing. “That boat seems to be wandering too and fro and showing no lights.”

“Call the duty signalman to the bridge!” Jamie turned and ran up a ladder.

“Now the duty signalman lay up to the bridge!” boomed from a loudspeaker.

Suddenly, an intense white shaft of light speared out from the Barry and caught the hapless boat in its beam.

“Ah it’s just some guys fishing,” said the sailor. The powerful light flashed on and off several times. The men in the boat turned on their running lights, started their engine, and made off to the west.

“Sorry to bother you, sir,” said the petty officer.

“No, thank *you* for being alert!” Jamie said, and returned to the wardroom.

When play resumed, Mr. Lo Gado bid four hearts and made five.

“Neck and neck!” said George.

Jamie struggled to make a two no trump bid.

A bell chimed for times and the loudspeaker announced: “Barry, arriving.”

Jamie stood up: “It’s the old man back aboard. Back in a minute.”

An officer strode into the wardroom, with Jamie immediately behind. The officer had an imposing presence, white uniform with two rows of decorations on his left breast. His epaulettes had three broad gold stripes, and the visor of the hat he had under his arm was decorated with gold lace. His fitness and vigor were quite apparent. He took in the wardroom at a glance.

“Captain, I’d like you to meet Miss Caterina Lo Gado and her father, Mr. Lo Gado. This is Captain Frederickson.”

“Very nice to have you on board, Miss Lo Gado, Mr. Lo Gado! Please sit down.” He poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down. ‘He has a great deal of self-confidence’, Caterina decided. His dark hair was flecked with grey along the sides.

“Who’s winning?” he inquired.

“Captain, Mr. Lo Gado and I won the first rubber and we each have a game in the second rubber,” George explained.

“You are playing with our resident card shark!” the captain told Mr. Lo Gado.

“Ah, I see! Means ‘shark with cards’,” Mr. Lo Gado smiled.

“Exactly, they say that George financed his college education playing cards,” said the captain.

“Not exactly, Captain. I had a scholarship, but I did play a little poker to cover my expenses.”

“Where did you go to university?” Caterina asked.

“University of Nevada. But the trick when you’re playing in Reno is to know which casino and exactly which table to play.”

“*Cati, we must go soon,*” Mr. Lo Gado suggested.

“No, no, finish the rubber by all means!” the captain said, guessing what Mr. Lo Gado meant.

“I’m going to turn in.” And he left the wardroom.

The next hand, Jamie went down one on a bid of two diamonds.

George dealt the crushing blow in the form of a bid for four spades on which he actually made six.

“Thank you very much, Mr. Lo Gado. I enjoyed playing with you. I think I’ll turn in also.”

“Thank *you*, George.”

“Mr. Morrison . . . or do I say ‘Jamie’ . . . thank you very much for your kind dinner and interesting inspection of your ship. Now, I like to return your kindness. I invite you to our family villa tomorrow – if you are willing – for dinner. Is OK, Cati?”

“Yes, Papa, by all means!” said Caterina, beaming.

“I would like that very much!” Jamie said.

“Cati meet you tomorrow at six on the very spot where George was meet tonight.”

Jamie escorted them to the quarterdeck where the boat was waiting, and he shook Mr. Lo Gado’s hand. Caterina kissed him on both cheeks and took his hand, briefly.

“See you tomorrow,” she said.

She was standing on the mole when he climbed the steps from the boat. It was windy. Her blue, long-sleeved blouse and knee-length, white, India printed skirt were rippling in the breeze. Her breasts were clearly outlined by the wind. ‘My God,’ he thought, ‘she’s not wearing a bra’.

She led him to her blue Fiat Punto which was double parked across the square from the harbor.

“It’s so nice to be having dinner with you again, Caterina! Particularly, since this is my last night in Palermo.”

“I know,” she said.

“How did you know?”

"I read it in the paper."

They drove in silence for a time. Caterina kept her eyes on the road.

'He seems like what I've always wanted,' she thought, *'intelligent, well educated, with good prospects, kind and so good looking'*. Her thoughts became a prayer; *'Blessed Mother, do not let him leave forever!'* repeated over and over.

Glancing at her, Jamie saw the turned down corners of her mouth and felt her low mood. He made his decision.

"I think I'd like to come back to Sicily – perhaps in August. I can get some leave – some holiday – then."

"Will you come to Palermo?" He thought he saw doubt in her face.

"Yes. Yes, I will come to Palermo."

She brightened. "That will be very nice!" Then: "we are now on the motorway – autostrada – we call it, from Palermo to Trapani. Our autostradas are quite good. It will take us just under an hour to reach home."

He glanced at the speedometer. She was doing a steady 150 kilometers per hour.

"You don't seem to be worried about speed limits," he observed.

"It is good road and the police don't bother in this area."

Past Castellammare del Golfo, they turned south and then west again toward Trapani. At Fulgatore, they left the autostrada, and began to follow signs for Baglionuovo.

"That's where we live," she said, pointing to the sign.

They began to climb, entering beautiful hilly country, dotted with small, stone farm houses. Suddenly she turned sharp left, climbed for 200 meters, turned right, climbed again and brought the car to a stop next to a Range Rover and a Volvo sedan.

"We've arrived," she announced.

He followed her up a broad flight of stone steps, and at the top, he saw the house. It was made of beige stone, two stories, rectangular, with a pergola covered in bougainvillea extending along one side. Above the pergola were several balconies. There appeared to be many windows and doors, each flanked by a pair of shutters which had been folded back. The house seemed to be built into the side of the mountain, and was looking out across a valley.

Caterina pushed open a door and walked in. "*We're here!*" she called.

Her mother appeared, wiping her hands on her apron: "*It's about time,*" she chided. "*Your father is in the living room!*"

She hugged her mother and made for the living room.

"*Buona sera, signora,*" Jamie offered

"*Buona sera,*" was the somewhat formal response.

"*Ciao, Papa!*"

"*Ciao, Cati!*"

"I think you remember this gentleman," she said, with mock gravity.

To Caterina: "Yes, of course! . . . *You goose!*" And to his guest, "I very much enjoyed the visit at your ship, Jamie."

"I'm very glad you did, sir. It has been quite a while since I've had such challenging games of bridge!"

"Will you take a glass of wine? Red perhaps?"

"Yes, sir, that would be excellent!" He smiled at Caterina, suddenly conscious of an intense feeling of happiness.

“This is our Cerasuolo, 1989. It is made from Nero d’Avola and Frappato grapes, both native to Sicily.

“My, that’s good! Jamie exclaimed. “Is the vineyard near here?”

“No it’s about 40 kilometers south of here in the Mazaro River valley. Perhaps next time you visit here, you like to take a tour – not as interesting like your ship.”

His eyes met Caterina’s. They nodded almost imperceptibly to each other.

“To me it would be much more interesting!”

“Come see the scene,” he said, leading them out onto the terrace, under the pergola. The house was indeed high on the hill, overlooking a grand expanse of valley, which was dotted with tiny villages. In the center of the vista was Lake Rubino, tinged slightly purple in the setting sun. To the left was Monte Grande, with the moon peeking over its slope. To the right and closer at hand was a broad olive grove, and directly in front of the veranda was a steep, terraced garden, filled with blooming shrubs, trees and flowers.

Jamie stared about him in amazement.

“I . . . I’ve never seen anything like this before,” he said emphasizing each word. He looked from Caterina to her father: “I think you live in the Garden of Eden.”

Seeing her father’s puzzled expression, Caterina translated.

“Ah, no,” Mr. Lo Gado said dismissively. “This is just a part of Sicily where we live!”

Mrs. Lo Gado’s voice came from inside: “*Dinner is on the table.*”

Jamie sat opposite Caterina and on her father’s right. There were bowls of olives, pickled onions and peppers; sliced, dried Sicilian sausage; platters of cheese; and baskets of fresh-baked bread on the table.

Mrs. Lo Gado served mammoth portions of lasagna to each of them. Jamie found the lasagna incredibly good. “It’s wild mushroom lasagna,” Caterina explained. “The mushrooms come from the forest behind the house.”

The lasagna was followed by tiny broiled, rib lamb chops, each representing a mouthful, but there were plenty of them. “They’re called ‘*scottaditto*’ – ‘burn your fingers’ – because you pick them up in your fingers. It’s not really a Sicilian dish, it’s more Roman, but we like them,” Caterina added.

As the meal progressed, Mr. Lo Gado recounted to his wife the highlights of their visit to the Barry the previous evening, with Caterina adding occasionally, and Jamie being asked, now and then, to clarify a doubtful point. “*My father likes him,*” Caterina thought. “*My mother has her own agenda, as usual, but I really like him, and somehow I have to show him.*”

Next came baked artichokes, tender, full of flavor, and without the fibrous leaves which Jamie would have expected. There was a platter of sliced, vine-ripened tomatoes, alternating with slices of mozzarella and topped with basil leaves.

“*If she can cook like her mother, I should propose to her right now*”, he thought, with an inner smile.

Finally, Mrs. Lo Gado served a container of coffee ice cream. Jamie looked up at her.

She was smiling faintly, with her head cocked on one side as if to say: “*Well, just this once.*”

Mr. Lo Gado got up from the table, returning with a bottle of yellow liquid, and some tiny glasses, as his wife was serving the coffee.

“Here is Limoncello!” he said, pouring some into each glass. “A Sicilian drink!”

‘This is delicious’, Jamie thought. The sourness of lemons tempered by sweetness and an alcoholic punch.

“This was a splendid dinner! Thank you very much!” he said.

Mrs. Lo Gado looked uncertain.

“*He said it was really excellent, Mama, and thank you very much!*” Caterina translated.

Mrs. Lo Gado broke into a broad smile and bowed slightly from her waist.

“Let’s go look at the moon, Jamie. It’s rising!” Caterina suggested. They strolled down through the garden, taking the steps down two, then three terraces. She thought: “*He must come back. . . not change his mind after he leaves. . . Blessed Mary, I must do something! What must I do?*”

The air was filled with the smell of jasmine. He turned to face her in the moonlight. She looked at him, and her lips were trembling. He leaned forward and kissed her on the mouth. She put an arm around his neck and pulled him against her, kissing him eagerly in return.

“Let’s sit down,” she suggested, and drew him toward a bench set against a terrace wall, under a lemon tree. He pulled her to him, and their mouths met, passionately, now. He could smell the gentle sweetness of her perfume and feel the softness of her cascading hair as it fell away from her face. His heart was racing. He reached up, gently brushed one of her breasts, and meeting no objection, he took it in his hand. It was soft and firm. “Oh, Jamie,” she breathed. He opened the buttons of her blouse and touched her bare skin. Gently, he rubbed her nipple, feeling it stiffen under his touch. “Oh, Jamie,” she whispered again.

Instinctively, his hand reached for her thigh.

“*I must!*” she thought, “*I must!*”

Her hand guided his beneath her skirt. Still kissing her passionately, his hand traveled slowly upward until he felt her panties. Gently he rubbed her sex.

“*Let him! Yes, let him!*” she thought.

His searching fingers found her glorious wetness. He began to stroke her, kissing her face and neck, wildly. “Oh, Jamie,” she stammered. Her breath was coming in ragged, rapid gusts, and he could feel the tenseness in her body. They clung to one another in a haze of excitement, both seeking her release. Suddenly, her hips convulsed, and she cried out softly; “oh . . . Oh . . . OOOH!”

Slowly, she regained her composure. “That . . . was . . . really . . . wonderful!”, she said, slowly speaking each word.

“*Go on!*” she thought, “*Go on!*”

She began to fumble with the front of his trousers. “Help me with your zipper,” she said. He pulled it down. She reached inside, taking hold of him. “Mmm” she murmured. His hand closed over hers. “Caterina,” he whispered. “It’s so good!” Her stroking became more urgent, and he could feel the tension growing inside him. All at once, it burst with an explosion of exquisite pleasure.

“Mmm, Mmm, Mmm.”

He sat spent for a moment, marveling at her. “You are wonderful!” he said.

She replied: “So are you!” She kissed him once again.

“Caterina?” he said.

“Yes?”

“Um . . . how am I going to say goodbye to your parents with my trousers looking like this?”

She looked down at his trousers, tried to suppress a giggle, and thought for a moment.

“I think you’re going to have an accident with the irrigation system.”

“I am?” he asked.

She led him into the living room. Her parents looked up from their reading.

"We've had an accident with the irrigation system."

"What is it?" her father asked.

"The connection to the tube that provides water to the lemon trees was leaking. I tried to tighten it, but it came loose and it sprayed Jamie."

"You silly girl," said her mother, getting up and surveying Jamie's trousers, which had been splashed with water.

"It's alright, Mrs. Lo Gado," Jamie offered. "It will dry in no time."

"At least get him a towel!" Mrs. Lo Gado ordered.

"It's OK, really," he insisted.

Caterina returned with a towel, offered it to him politely, and pushed him toward the lavatory. She gave him a quick conspiratorial grin, like a naughty child.

A few moments later, he returned.

"I have to drive Jamie back now."

Jamie repeated his thanks to her parents.

"When you come to Sicily again, you are most welcome here," her father suggested. Jamie caught Mrs. Lo Gado's momentary frown; he glanced at Caterina, who was nodding vigorously.

"That would be very nice. Perhaps in August."

"In August, you see wine harvest!" was Mr. Lo Gado's response.

With real enthusiasm, Jamie said: "I'd like to see that." He turned to Caterina; "Can you write down your address for me?"

"Yes!" She rushed to get some paper and a pencil.

"You can write your address here," she suggested, and wrote down her own address carefully.

Her eyes were sparkling.

He wrote down the: c/o USS Barry (DDG 52), Fleet Post Office, New York address, and handed it to her. "Sometimes the mail takes a while to reach us," he explained. "For example, if a letter were sent now, it would go to New York, then all the way back to the Mediterranean; it would be sorted on the carrier, and transferred to us when we are alongside her refueling. Maybe two or three weeks."

She nodded briefly, and smiled, as if to say; *"That's not what matters; what matters is that I have your address and you have mine!"*

In the car, she asked: "Tell me of your family, Jamie."

"Well, my father is a lawyer with a large Philadelphia law firm. He specializes in anti-trust law – kind of a dry subject, I think. But he has quite a reputation arguing cases. My mother has never worked, except to bring up my brother and me." He thought for a moment: "I guess sometimes that was a bit of a chore!" He laughed. "She keeps herself busy playing tennis, going to garden club, and working for charities."

"She sounds like a nice lady. . . What is 'garden club'?"

"It's primarily a social club. The ladies get together at a member's house every month or so for lunch. One of the members will give a talk about a selected plant and how to care for it. Or someone will come in and discuss a particular garden problem and how to solve it. They participate in the big Philadelphia flower show, and do floral arrangements which compete with other clubs."

"Your garden at home must be very beautiful."

“It is very nice, but rather different than yours. Yours is big and wild and beautiful. . . .”
He paused a moment, looking at her: “*like you*”. She glanced at him, reading his thoughts, and blushed.

“Mother has a manicured approach to our garden. Each flower bed is carefully weeded and is always presenting the right plants for the season to their best advantage.”

“You have many brothers and sisters?”

“I have a younger brother, John. He’s the brains of the family. He’s a senior at Georgetown University, studying political science. His plan is to be President one day!” he said, shaking his head with a smile.

“You graduated from Yale four years ago so you’re about 25?” she guessed.

“Very good. I’ll be 25 in August.”

“I was 25 in January. In Europe, it takes a little longer to get through university and out into the real world. . . . When in August is your birthday?”

“It’s the 14th. . . . When in January is your birthday?”

“The 8th.”

She parked the car at the harbor and they got out. On the mole, they turned to face each other. Her lips were trembling. “Come back to me, Jamie!” she whispered.

He took her in his arms, hugging her tightly to him. “I will come back for you, Caterina,” he promised.

They kissed, clinging to one another, fiercely. There were tears streaming down her face. He felt the tears welling up in his own eyes.

“I will come back for you, Caterina.”

As he boarded the ship, he found that his trousers were dry.