

CHAPTER 33 – DUMPING RELIGIOUS VOWS.

*17 08 2022 Wednesday. Frank and Jaquie
visit Tonio. Tonio wants to quit.*

As usual Jaquie meets Frank at Cafe Discorso and exchange hugs and kisses. Frank seemed to be in heaven after a miserable week. Jaquie seemed equally happy. Having finished breakfast they set off to Tonio's Monastery. They walked in. Knocked on Tonio's door.

"Papa how are you? Hello Jaquie how are you?"

"Good thank you."

"You both look great."

Tonio offers them a soda or a Martini.

"Martini please. Two."

"So Tonio been praying a lot? How's life at the Monastery?"

"No doubt, it's close to God. But far away from everybody else.

Always locked in prayer."

"Claustrophobic at times."

"Covid isolation has not been a problem for me as you can imagine.

Not much different. If anything I have more time to pray."

"What, what have you been praying for? Rainfall? More sunshine?

Peace?"

"Well, dad, I am praying for the courage to get out of here. Break away in the free world."

"And that means what? Exactly."

"Well, I met a beautiful woman. I will come straight to the point. I would like to get married."

"Okay if that's what you want."

Jaquie looked on not knowing what to say. Frank looked at Jaquie.

"What do you think of all this Jaquie?"

"It's not my place to say. My opinion, it's your calling Tonio and it's your call."

"What else? Who is this young lady?"

“Suor Maria Allegri. I saw her in our church a few times. Our eyes met. And we clicked.”

“Did it make a noise? The Click?”

“Dad, you always had a good sense of humour.”

“So?”

“We met while on a passeggiata in nearby gardens a while ago.”

“Did you plan it?”

“No. It must have been God’s will.”

“She motioned me towards her and then moved behind a huge tree under the shade.”

“And we kissed. And that made a noise. Nobody was around.”

“Wow, wow, wow easy son. If it made a noise, ehm ... I would say it would have been on the cheek.”

Jaquie looked at Frank and smiled.

“As you can see, Tonio has been quicker than you, even though it was on the cheek.”

“Cheeky lady.” Frank said with a smile.

“What happened next?”

“She said she is going to leave the order if I am willing to do the same and marry her. I said YES.”

“So I want to leave this order. I have to get a dispensation from Rome.”

“I don’t want to wait ten years, if ever.”

Tonio looked at Frank, stretched his right hand forward and rubbed his thumb and forefinger together.

“It’s a sign our Church, like all other churches, understands very well. And produces results.”

“Are you sure about this? It was your mum’s wish to join the order.”

“My mum passed. I have a future Dad.”

“Very well then. I will speak to Gino to arrange this.”

Frank calls Gino.

“Hi Dad.”

“I am with Tonio. Tonio made a decision. To leave the order and get married.”

“I had a feeling he was not happy.”

“We need a dispensation from Rome. You need to talk to a high authority in Rome. The Vatican. I am sure though that you will require an intermediary. And from there to their Legal Office.”

“I would say about 30,000.”

“Dollars or Euros.”

“Good old British Pounds. The pound is still highly regarded in Italy. The dollar is dirty. Hollywood movies and everything else. The Euro too close for comfort.”

“I will get moving immediately. What’s Tonio going to do when he gets out? Maybe he can run part of the company. I could do with another family member.”

“Not in his plans at the moment Gino.”

“He is getting married. Suor Maria Allegri. She will be able to renounce her vows and obligations more comfortably.”

“But just in case, have 15000 in reserve.”

“My FC Fund should be used.”

“Got all that dad. Pass me to Tonio please.”

“Tonio I will call you later on. Have all the relevant details ready. Quick Exit. Leave it to me. Ciao.”

Tonio looked at Jaquie.

“What do you think of all this Jaquie?”

“Fascinating. Maybe somewhat intriguing. But all in a good cause.”

“Indeed, let’s all have another drink. Martini please.”

“Coming up. Let’s toast and then you may leave in peace!”

“I will be able continue with my prayers then. And both of you will be remembered in all my prayers in the days to come.”

*24 08 2022 Wednesday. Chapter 33
Section Break*

Gino talks to the Vatican Legal Office.

Frank made some frantic phone calls through his London solicitors after getting further advice from the family priest. He was given the

name and number of the lawyer who would be the intermediary between the applicant priest and the Vatican.

Dottore Giovanni Petrucci.

Gino was passed this lawyer's number in Rome.

Gino promptly called him and introduced himself and briefed him.

"Please let me have some details, contact point and we will discuss the difficult matters after that."

"Okay the name is Tonio Costanzo. He is a priest at the Franciscan Monastery in Modena."

"I know all the Modena details."

"How old is he?"

"35."

"Why leave?"

"Wants to get married."

"How anxious is he?"

"Very very very. Urgent."

"Has he already met his future wife?"

"Yes."

"Serious woman?"

"Yes."

"I will put the case forward to the Vatican. To Montecelli. Bishop Montecelli. He is the bishop who looks at these applications, fills all the papers, makes and checks details, history of the family etc etc etc. Then he will have an audience with the Pope normally once every two weeks on these matters. But if it's very urgent he can move the audience with His Holiness quicker."

"You understand all the Church Bureaucracy takes long time, very very long. It employs outside professionals and it costs quite a bit of money to get the papers from me to Bishop Montecelli who is the sole channel for this."

Then Montecelli to somebody else back to Montecelli then to the Pope's private secretary, and then to the Pope who may even be on some Crusade overseas, the Lord forbids. If that is the case, His Holiness can be reached on his secure mobile. Every day he attends to 100 different things so probably he only asks one question"

“Okay, Okay, Okay, Dottore Petrucci, can I stop you. Please, Please. How much?”

“Thank you for asking. It would be in round figures one moment please. 26,000 to 30,000.”

“Dollars?”

“No no. British Pounds.”

“Okay your number has now registered on my Mobile.”

“The money will be transferred to the Banco Espresso Speciale di Roma. They have a special channel to the Vatican’s treasury. That fee would cover all costs including my fees.”

“Okay how do I know if all this is going to work in a very short time? Even as a priest, my brother never discovered the virtue of Patience. He may decide to quit on his own. That is my fear. I want him to have a clean sheet with the Lord. You understand.”

“Patience is only inherited. Most people of Italian origin lack that. Because they are so passionate.”

“I will call Montecelli tomorrow with all details. And time constraints. He will let me know the expected date of a sanctioned departure from the fold. I will call you to confirm. Immediately. And I will give you the bank details.”

“If Montecelli says a week on Monday, for example, then have a nice suit ready for Tonio to change into when he walks out of the monastery. I mean a full outfit. I can recommend the special tailors. Only in Rome. All above board of course.”

“Thank you Dottore. But I think he always fancied himself in a Hugo Boss.”

Three days later Gino gets a call from Dottore Petrucci. He was given a “release” date of 4th September with all the official documents signed sealed and delivered by Express Couriers to the London Headquarters. Gino was asked to consider a final contribution to the Monastery paid directly to the Monastery.

Gino calls Tonio.

“Yes Gino, I am about to go celebrate the 10.30 mass.”

“Hi Lover Boy.”

“You cannot say such thing. I am in the House of God.”

“Sorry. Something to celebrate indeed. All the papers from the Curia will be with me in 4 days’ time. I will be there with a new Hugo Boss outfit for you on the 4th September. You change into the new suit, grab your belongings and you’re out. Papa will pick you up. You’re booked in Papa’s hotel for a few days. Just SMS me your measurements waist, height, inside legs, arms etc and shoe size.”

“Oh Gino, shoes eh..., I like Fendi Leather Loafers with logo on top – black. I feel guilty. I am thinking of Jesus sandals.”

“Don’t let it spoil your day, Tonio.”

“Thank you. Something to celebrate indeed. I wonder about Suor Maria.”

“Dad will visit the Mother Superior with a contribution of 5000 Euros to help with the new Chapel. It should sweeten the deal. He will organize a cab for her family to receive her when she walks out of the convent. Maybe on the same day. Prada for Maria.”

“Oh. Thank the Lord. I have to go. My shepherd is calling.”

Gino calls Frank with the news and gives him the details.

*27 08 2022 Saturday. Chapter 33
Section Break*

Jaquie and Frank get very busy.

All of a sudden Frank’s life turned into a hive of activity. He was snowed under, running errands, making calls to monasteries, convents, adjusting hotel bookings for Tonio, getting to Hugo Boss with the measurements he wished he owned, running envelopes with cash etc. He was looking forward with excitement, though. Once Tonio left the Monastery, he was constantly ferried between one place and another in the Bugatti.

This change of pace continued for a fortnight at least. After that, calm descended.

Jaquie was as busy as ever. Breakfasts were becoming more common than dinners and inevitably activity slowed down a bit with Frank's increasing wear and tear. But still very caring for Frank. She started calling him Frankie. He liked Frankie more than Frank. It sounded more intimate.

She seemed to be at the peak of her career flying to Rome, Venice, Milan and London. 3 days here, then back, then 3 days somewhere else, on and on and on. She started feeling burnt down by her Versace obligations. And other top fashion houses were after her services too. She was putting savings away for a rainy day.

No new Prada shoes every other week, however. Even Frank commented and congratulated on her newly acquired more prudent way of spending.

*18 09 2022 Sunday. Chapter 33 Section
Break*

*Tonio reveals the wedding date to Jacquie
and Frank.*

Tonio unexpectedly shows up at Cafe Discorso.

"Oh Tonio, you are joining us for breakfast."

"If I may take a seat."

"So what the latest?"

"Maria and I are getting married."

Jaquie and Frank look stunned.

"So soon? When?"

"1st October."

“That quick.”

“Yes. At my Monastery.”

“The new priest will conduct the ceremony.”

“We thought we will keep the wedding ceremony small.”

“Our honeymoon will be in the Eternal City.”

“I would like you, Jaquie, Gino, Maria’s parents and the best man. Filippo Fallone would be okay.”

“Fine.”

“That’s six people, Maria and me.”

“You don’t need a calculator for that.”

“How you going to pay?”

“I am not. You are. Sorry Dad.”

“Ho Ho Ho Ho. Didn’t take you long to learn about financial matters.”

“Only joking. If you can loan me or help me that would be good.”

“Work out the expenses. I will talk to Gino. All will be done.”

“How is your little Fiat going?”

“Better than a cart and a horse. Thanks for that.”

“Jaquie, Dad, I have to rush. Lovely arms are waiting to greet me. Off to her mum’s house.”

“And I don’t want to take too much of your time. Enjoy life. So I have to fly.”

“Okay drive carefully.”

Jaquie waves him goodbye with a smile.

“He is like a little kid who found a jar of lollies.”

“Frankie you are a good Dad. Nice to your sons and me of course. It’s nice to see that.”

Frank looks at Jaquie.

“Tell me about your family.”

She was pensive for a while.

“Emile. She is very dear to me. She is 36. She was born Let’s say unwell. She is permanently in a wheelchair. Her head works okay, but the rest of the body does not. She needs constant attention using a maid and a nurse. My other sister Edith. She is 34. Teaches in a local school. Husband is an accountant. Two kids. She helps Emile when she can. My brother Jacques. He is doing charity work in Sudan. He calls once a year. Christmas time.”

“I spoke to Gino when I was in Scotland. I felt I was going to crash the Bugatti on the treacherous roads. Fog, sleet, rain. Or an airplane could come down and hit me on the head. I told him to look after Tonio. And I told him to look after certain expenses you are incurring for Emile, whether you’re doing well or not. And a couple of other delicate things leaving certain decisions entirely in his own hands as he sees fit. I was feeling very depressed and lonely. After my conversation I felt relieved and good.”

Jaquie looked down feeling obviously distraught. She went to the ladies powder room and returned.

“It’s Sunday, let’s go for a drive.”

*01 10 2022 Saturday. . Chapter 33
Section Break*

*Tonio gets married in the Franciscan
Monastery Chapel in Modena.*

It is a beautiful chapel. It was adorned with flowers at the altar. A little organ at the back played the bridal march. And Tonio’s favourite hymn the Ave Maria.

The priest who would replace Tonio conducted the ceremony and offered them communion which the bride and groom received with grace.

There was no pomp. Filippo Fallone was there with the rings ready to hand them over for the rite of passage. A couple of kisses later the ceremony was over. Maria insisted that she wanted the utmost simplicity in line with her disciplined life at the convent. And Tonio was in perfect agreement. But more in haste perhaps.

Gino was standing by himself in the church looking at Tonio and was very happy for him too. He thought Maria looked just like how Tonio had described her. Just like Saint Theresa and the Virgin Mary. She had traits of both. The look in her eyes and the innocence of her face depicted by both these pillars of the Catholic faith.

The ceremony was over in half an hour. They walked out slowly from the altar after showing the appropriate genuflections and bows. They started walking slowly to the door both wearing a smile and a sigh of relief. Frank was caught shedding a tear or two. That did not go unnoticed by Jaquie. More wedding music and of course a repeat of the Ave Maria.

They all drove to the hotel and shared a few drinks and sweets. Even Cassata Siciliana was on display ready for consumption and promptly dispatched with.

One hour later, a quick change and they drove off to Rome in Tonio's modest Fiat to an address unknown.
