

CHAPTER 35 – GINO’S & JAQUIE’S DIFFERENT but SAME TRAJECTORIES.

16 12 2022 Friday. Gino calls Jaquie. She gets a Christmas Invitation.

Gino calls Jaquie. She answers the phone.

“Hi Gino, it’s Jaquie. I just realized this is your Dad’s special CIA phone. He paid for it during that saga.”

“Keep that. It may come in handy.”

“Have you recovered from the ordeal?”

“Indeed. I am calling you to invite you over for Christmas. Join me, Tonio, Maria and some other friends.”

“Thank you Gino, I had already accepted the invitation.”

“Indeed. How could I have missed that? So how is your schedule?”

“Tight. In this case I have to make a quick booking. Otherwise all fights will be closed.”

“If need be, I will organize a private jet. Not my own. But it will do the job.”

“That’s flattering. I am sure a scheduled flight will be okay.”

“Make the booking say arriving 3 days before Christmas. Let me know. I will have the company limousine picking you up from the airport.”

“I will book you a very comfortable suite in the same hotel as last time. All expenses paid.”

“And we will take it on from there. I will let Tonio know too.”

“Thank you so much. Just a quick question, hopefully you haven’t heard from the old friends in Newark.”

“No, but I noticed some flowers and cards for the service. One was from Angelo. The other one from Johnny.”

“Mrs. Baxter sent them an appreciative *Thank You* note.”

“That was thoughtful. Okay Gino I will let you know. Bye.”

“Ciao.”

Gino got up and poured himself a drink. And stared at the outside. No spectacular view to appreciate from the top of a three storey building.

Nevertheless he could see it was dull as usual. Then he got up and poured himself another.

Later on that day Gino received an SMS from Jaquie with her itinerary.

“Gino. Hi. Arriving Heathrow 2.30 pm on 22nd. Departing 27th 10.30 am from Heathrow. Looking forward to Xmas. Jaquie.”

She muttered to herself. “Short, to the point and professional, I hope.”

Gino SMS’S back.

“Awesome. Gino”

He calls the company chauffeur and confirms the limousine availability for the day.

*22 12 2022 Thursday. Chapter 35
Section Break*

*Limousine picks Jaquie up from the
Airport.*

Jaquie walks out of Arrivals and into the limousine. The door is held open by Gino’s chauffer who was impeccably dressed. Maybe dressed to impress.

“I will take the luggage, Ma’am.”

Jaquie gets in and Tom closes the door firmly but without a bang. He puts the luggage in the boot. Gets in the car and starts the drive from the Airport to the hotel.

“It smells of very expensive upholstery as I am sure it is.”

“Yes ma’am one of the best. It must be maintained regularly and kept in perfect mint condition.”

“Well it certainly is in excellent condition. Looks like Connelly Leather.”

“Very knowledgeable in fine works of art, ma’am.”

“Part of my job I suppose. Things have changed. Conservation Issues. Unfortunately such original leather is still sought after by these filthy rich showoffs who never produced a thing in their lives. At the cost of hundreds of animals”

“Well said ma’am. You must feel passionate about environmental issues.”

“I got fired from two agencies for refusing to promote leather for some top fashion products.”

“You’re in advertising, modelling things like that. I confess I don’t know anything about that at all. And how are you ma’am?”

“Very well thank you.”

“My name is Tom. Plenty of Tom’s in England.”

“Like Joe’s in Italy. My name is Jaquie. You don’t need to be so formal with me.”

“Mr. Costanzo always insisted we show maximum respect to our guests irrespective. Hard to shake a habit like that after 15 years. So sad he passed. Gino is as passionate about appearances.”

“I hope your stay in London would be a pleasant one em Jaquie. I will also be your driver when you decide to leave.”

“Thank you Tom, that would be the 27th at this moment.”

“We’re almost there. At The Strand. The Savoy Hotel. Have a good stay.”

Tom opens the door for her. She thanked him.

The porter came out promptly and took the luggage. He was used to handle high quality leather. He was being extra careful thinking she might be a model. They could be bitchy at times and he did have a couple of unpleasant experiences. Maybe it was the colour of his skin. The one who gave him heaps was from Nigeria herself. Terrible. Jaquie checked in. She thanked him graciously and put a nice “Euro Tip” in his hand.

“Thank you ma’am. Very kind.”

“And your name is?” She was squinting at the name on his badge.

“Afamefuna. A-fa-me-funa. Born in Lagos Nigeria. Everybody calls me Funa.”

“Nigeria. I would like to go there one day. Funa.”

“Very pleasant out of Lagos. Wild life and all that. Thank you.”

Her suite was on the second floor with very good street views. Settled in. She dials Gino.

“Gino here.”

“Hi it’s Jaquie. I hope you’re well. So, what’s on the program?”

“Okay, I thought dinner for me, you, Tonio and Maria. Four of us. 6.30 for drinks at your hotel.”

“That’s perfect. Time for rest, nap, shower and looking forward to the evening.”

“Okay Jaquie, till then. Ciao.”

“Bye.”

*22 12 2022 Thursday. Chapter 35
Section Break*

*Dinner & Chat. Jaquie, Gino, Tonio and
Maria at the Savoy Hotel.*

They had a round of drinks, followed by a second one. They glanced at the Menu.

“We’re back on a sensible diet now.” says Tonio.

I have to confess we went wild with food after living on rationed bread for a few years.

Maria joins the conversation.

“Most definitely. Also our family could never afford quality food. That’s even before I was in the Convent. We’re lucky. Think of the less fortunate around the world.”

“Maybe we should ask for a Sicilian Menu.”

“This is not the last supper Tonio. Let’s keep our waists in our thoughts.”

“Very true.”

So they chit chatted for the next 90 minutes or so.

“Are you staying in this hotel too, Tonio?” asks Jaquie.

“No it’s one that is a bit less fancy. Not a convent by any means.”

“Tonio wants to live within his own means until he gets out of his apprenticeship.” says Maria.

“Tonio, you are doing really well. The coaching from Filippo has been fantastic. Mrs. Baxter, an old devotee of my father treats you like a son, Maria prepares your dinners. In no time you can take control of Customer Care Division of the company. That’s what you wanted. Right?”

“Correct I like dealing with people. Any big problems I will pass them straight on to you Gino.”

“Thank you.”

“How’s your cooking Maria?”

“I have been domesticated well. I learnt a lot of the cooking skills from my mother, no worries for Tonio’s stomach there. Can you cook Jaquie?”

“Not my forte. My career spoilt me in that regard. But I will tell you a secret about my cooking skills. I excel at making toast. I know which way it goes in and which way it pops out.”

They all laugh.

“Spreading the butter tends to test me a bit. Especially if the butter is cold. Really, I can do light cooking but I have a complete lack of imagination when it comes to creative cooking. I will struggle even with a typed recipe let alone handwritten.”

“What about you Gino?”

“You know me, I never boast. Even if I do, then I make sure it’s subtle.”

All laugh.

“So I can boil the spaghetti with no problem. Al Dente.”

“Oh that’s it?”

“It’s the sauce that makes it. That’s an acquired specialty. From my mum.”

Another round of laughs.

“Let me take a couple more sips first. Okay have you got pen and paper ready. I won’t repeat this again. I can’t tell the same lies exactly as the first ones certainly but not in the same order.”

“Come on Gino. He’s always been like that. Likes to brag a little. Just an art I suppose. My monastery tells me to keep it humble and simple. I have to say the bread is always tops. Likewise the wine. But only one glass. Back to your sauce Gino.”

“First you got to know. Is it Marinara, Carbonara, Bolognese, Siciliana? Very important.”

“So you have to know that. Then you mix and match. Meatballs, garlic, olive oil. First problem with the olive oil. Italy? But where from Italy, which province, could be Spanish. That reminds me of the onions.”

“Yes don’t forget the onions.”

“Or the eye drops. Make sure you’re not sad on the day. Otherwise it will be a tragedy. Pepper, Salt. Mix them together, keep them at the right temperature. When ready mix the sauce with the spaghetti.”

“Ah. Another sip. Remember this is nothing but a show.”

“Remember your guests are looking at you. You are an actor. So the expression on your face has to be perfect and completely misleading. The way you move your lips, your head, how you frown etc etc.”

“One more sip of this delicate wine. Beautiful”

“Before you even taste it, you start mumbling to yourself. Em. Mamma mia. Wow. Awesome. Moving your tongue inside your mouth, from one side to the other. Exactly all the stuff you see on television. And then Voila.”

“And another sip for Gino.”

“Then you have let’s say 4 plates ready. You lean over the kitchen top and look slowly and closely at each plate making sure your head does not drop in one of them. You turn the plate round and round, cleaning off any drops of sauce that look out of place, moving a spaghetti, notice singular not plural, – only one white worm - a few millimetres in or out, another spaghetti to the left or to the right. All this has to be done with a delicate touch.”

He pauses and pours himself another half a glass of wine.

“Now this is very important. All this while your audience is mesmerised looking at the show with a dropped jaw. So they see you as a Picasso at work. Everybody admires you. But they don’t necessarily understand. Like a Picasso masterpiece, they all admire it but they don’t have a clue. And for that matter neither does the chef, more humbly described in a derogatory way as the cook.”

“And another drink for me. Do help yourself.”

“So it’s all bullshit.”

Maria crosses herself. Everybody else laughs.

And the guests clap at this modern day Picasso who mixes colour using just a spoon and no brush. And Mr. Picasso is very happy with his sauce. The picture is the spaghetti and the canvas is the plate. And they laugh and clap.

Then he stops.

“Gino, Gino is that it?”

“Hell no. I am waiting for the applause.”

And another round of hearty laughter. This time with applause as a side dish.

“Do you want another drink Gino?”

“No Jaquie. I am done. I am toast. His face got serious.”

“I would like to ask if we can meet tomorrow here at about 11 am. I would like us to listen and discuss dad’s last conversation he had with me. I will have a tape with me. We will be able to play it back.”
