

CHAPTER 36 – FRANK’S HIGHLANDS’ WISHES FROM GLENFINNAN.

*23 12 2022 Friday. Savoy Hotel Meeting
to discuss Frank’s wishes.*

The next morning they all met at the bar at The Savoy Hotel. They had their first round of Martini.

“At this stage I would like to keep perfectly sober so I will order a Perrier myself. You are free to get what you want.”

Jaquie was apprehensive what’s on the tape and how’s she is involved in all this. She kept a neutral if not a serene look. They looked at each other. Maria asked for San Pellegrino.

Jaquie, the same so they got three San Pellegrino. Gino asked for the use a private room and they were ushered to one on the same floor.

“This conversation took place while Dad was in Scotland reflecting and looking for peace. He seemed rather agitated. Maybe a little confused. So I let him talk without interrupting him. It dawned on me soon after he started that I should tape his words thinking he was confiding in me something that should be clear to all of us sometime in the future.”

“At this stage he did not know about Tonio’s intentions. So there were two short chats. The second one I recorded in full. Without any further ado, this is what transpired.”

The tape played on. They all became tearful.

“Let’s hear it again.”

Jaquie looked at all of them.

“I don’t know what to say. That is very kind, considerate and generous. I never asked your dad for any favours, emoluments or expressed other

similar desires. Never asked about the business. As a matter of fact he asked me about my sister only of late. And I was surprised.”

“What you are saying is ample clear from what dad said and we are not doubting that.”

He looks at Tonio.

“We implemented your part of the deal and we hope you’ll make a great contribution to the company. Maria will choose what part she wants to play in the family and business.”

Jaquie reached for a handkerchief. Tonio took the opportunity while she was looking down in her bag to give Gino a meaningful WINK.

Gino understood the meaning behind the wink and gave Tonio a restrained *I’ll go along* smile. He looked at Jaquie.

“Jaquie, you heard Dad. He regards you as part of the family. Family matters can be rather delicate. I will be perfectly honest. I want to listen to the tape again tomorrow.”

“In the meantime a company ‘Russell & Johnson Advertising’ called me to see if we allow them to have a shoot using the Bugatti as a prop. I said it’s the most inappropriate moment. They will call in a fortnight. But I thought it’s something you understand. What do you think?”

“It’s your company, your business and Tonio’s and your car. So.”

“True.”

“As a matter of interest what fashion line?”

“YSL.”

“My opinion. Certainly No. Frank was a Versace man through and through.”

“Okay that does it.”

“Well we had a good discussion. We will have something to eat. It’s only 1 o’clock. And then up to you. I will go home myself.”

“Myself and Maria will do the same. You Jaquie?”

“I will go up to my room for a rest. Then I will go for a tour around the London Landmarks around 4 o’clock.”

“Please Jaquie don’t object. I will get Tom to drive you around to wherever. It’s more comfortable than a cab. 4.30 okay.”

“Most appreciated. Thank you.”

“Maybe then we can meet about 6 tomorrow for dinner. Savoy.”

Gino calls Tom.

“Tom, it’s Gino. Could you please take Jaquie on a sightseeing tour of London landmarks. Few places she would like to drive by. About 4.30. Am I messing your afternoon up?”

“Not at all. Will be there 4.30.”

“Jaquie Tom will pick you up at 4.30.”

“Thanks.”

At 7.00 pm Gino calls Tonio.

“So what do you think of Dad’s thoughts?”

“Come on Gino. I already gave you the wink. Coming from your brother, one wink should be enough of a signal.”

“Wh ... Wh ... what are you saying?”

“I have been hearing confessions at the Monastery for the last few years. The message from dad was loud and clear but subtle. Admittedly not spelt out in full. He wants you to marry her. Maybe he did not want to see her wandering around lost. Like a lost soul. She never made a pass for any possessions. Crystal clear. She may have loved Papa but she was not in love. Google that. There is a big difference.”

“That’s food for thought.”

“Yes, put a bit of sauce on the spaghetti and get on with it. I am already ahead of you in this game.”

"You're funny Tonio."

"Okay then ... no problem."

"Yes but ..."

"But what?"

"I think Dad knew her really well."

"So what. People often know other parties have been involved before they marry. People come to communion every day. They share the body of Christ. The passion of Christ was for all of us. You need to interpret our Christian Values well. That is why you need me. I am the theologian."

"Tonio you have absolutely flattened me. I don't know what to say."

"I am the intermediary. Do you want me to handle it? I can work miracles if I have to."

"Okay then brother. GET ME A RESULT WILL YOU."

"That's my boy. My beautiful Maria is cooking my spaghetti – Marinara. I will call you after my dinner and a glass of wine."

"Okay."

Tonio calls Gino.

"Yes Tonio."

"The Marinara was beautiful."

"And the sauce?"

"Even better."

"I will call her first thing in the morning."

"I will meet her without Maria. But of course I will tell Maria what this is all about. Maria will pray for you and her to the same saint she prayed to before she got out of the convent."

"I will introduce the subject gently. I will take it on from there."

"We would prefer you wrap this thing around in the next 18 hours."

"You will not make any announcements till after Xmas. None to our friends."

"And then boo boom."

24 12 2022 Saturday. Chapter 36
Section Break

*Tonio meets Jaquie at the Savoy.
Discusses Gino.*

The day before Christmas, Tonio calls Jaquie.

"Hi Jaquie. It's Tonio."

"What happened? Is Gino with you? He had too much to drink the other day. He was very upset."

"I suppose we all are. That probably includes you. But this is Christmas time. Time to rejoice."

"Would you be celebrating Mass again?"

"Nothing as sacred as that. Maybe even more. Can I see you alone, you and me at about 11 o'clock. Or were you planning on something else?"

"No just going out for a leisurely walk in the local gardens."

"How about 10.30 the Savoy lobby?"

"Okay. Will be there."

Tonio was there at 10.20. He ordered two Martinis. Jaquie showed up at 10.30 on the dot and sat down.

"So what did you make out of dad's tape?"

"Not sure. A bit unnerving."

"Okay."

"Tonio I noticed you are a straight talker, you move fast, hence the speed of your wedding to Maria."

"Yes."

"By the way Maria is absolutely stunning. She is a natural. No need for a Versace or YSL or Prada. Happiness to both of you. I did not have time to tell you."

"Thank you. And you were saying"

"You say what you have on your mind without meandering, indeed without hesitation. Maybe it's behaviour learnt at the Monastery."

"This is fascinating Jaquie. Go on."

"If a sinner came to you in the confession booth seeking redemption you will not let that person wait for an excruciatingly long time before you give them your blessing. *Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis.*"

"My God how do you know all this?"

"I too was in a Catholic convent. So?"

"Your assessment of me is absolutely correct. I think dad's wish was that you become part of the family by marrying Gino. You listen to the words carefully. Can I be more clear."

"Clear enough. The thought did cross my mind. But I am in no position to know what is right and what is wrong in this situation."

Tonio pauses.

"Gino is smart, very smart. He handles lots of rejections in his day to day work. This was one he was uncomfortable with. He asked me what I thought of dad's wishes. I spelt it out quicker than the speed of light. I told him I will find out. Size up the situation if you will. He was relieved when I told him so. You could feel it on the phone. He is willing to explore further."

"That's a good way of putting it. He treated me like a queen. Even before the events of the last few days. I got to know him, and observe him. He is less stern than I thought. That episode about the Picasso Chef made me really, really laugh. And I could see the other side of this personality. That pleased me. I do have a sense of humour too. As weird as his was during his verbal demonstration. Both of us have to think about it."

"What do I tell Gino?"

"Patience is a virtue."

"Yes ... and?"

"All that glitters is not gold."

"Yes ... and?"

"He needs to scratch the surface to find out if it's gold or bronze."

"Yes ... and?"

"Tonio you are insufferable. Honestly. I hope Maria is more forgiving than me."

"Yes ... and?"

"Okay we go out together for a few days. One thing I learnt from your Dad. He never made a pass at me for quite a few days. That earned my respect for him."

"Wow. I won. We all won." He got up gave her a kiss on the forehead turned and walked away. Then he stopped and turned around.

“By the way, I will tell Gino to keep his hands to himself. Under strict orders ... until the time comes. I feel the power of God inside me. Bye Jaquie.”

Jaquie bobbles her head gently from one side to the other in disbelief. She mutters “What is it with these Italians, they get so excited.”

Tonio gets in his car and calls Gino.

“And the news is ?”

“Game on. You need to behave yourself like Papa did. I tell you all about it as soon as I get home. I have to drive and I don’t want to lose my license.”

“Will be waiting.”

*25 12 2022 Sunday. Chapter 36 Section
Break*

Xmas Party at the Savoy.

It is Christmas Day. They planned to meet all at 11.00 in a small Savoy function room reserved for them.

Gino, Tonio and Maria were there.

Jaquie called saying she was 15 minutes late.

Tonio started talking to Gino about the upcoming romantic event. Maria immediately excused herself saying she was going for a walk looking at the shops. She never felt comfortable getting involved in family matters. Tonio continues with his intended advice.

“No discussions about this outside the circle of four. No passes, no winks, no holding hands, no kisses, no funny looks at each other or any gestures that would indicate to our guests and friends there is something smelling of roses in the air.”

“All our friends have to be kept in the dark until there is an announcement from you to be made in the New Year, I hope.”

“The wedding date, God willing, will be up to you. The sooner the better. That is only an opinion for what it’s worth. Myself, I decided to get it over and done with. I jumped in the Monastery with both feet. ... The wedding with full force. It’s a waste of time holding hands and playing lovey dovey for a year or so. If you love her and you’re ready then move on. Oops. Here comes Jaquie.”

They all stood up and greeted each other.

“Where’s Maria?”

“Just went for a wander around. Feels a little uncomfortable listening to these matters. Still very much a convent girl.”

Jaquie nods.

“Hi Jaquie. Tonio just briefed me on the protocol. He did so yesterday and just now. I am going to the bar and order some drinks. Tonio, you may kindly repeat your thoughts to Jaquie. By the way I am in total agreement. I hope you too. Tonio you are doing a great job. I mean that. In true Sicilian Priest-Family traditions.”

Gino smiles and walks out.

“Tonio, it’s so nice to see family harmony.”

“We love each other.”

“Okay what else should I be made aware of?”

“Just expanded on what we agreed yesterday. In short, neither Gino ... nor you must not give the game away to our guests and friends.”

“I understand. Perfect acting required.”

Gino and Maria walk in together.

The drinks are served. They all stand up. Glasses clink. Merry Christmas and cheers ring out. Few guests included Mrs. Baxter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Fallone, one of Tonio’s best friend, the priest at the burial, the rest friends of the family.

Lunch was served with many a round of drinks.

Everybody joined in the conversation. The chit-chat moved from the popular topic of life in a convent and in a monastery, to modelling, old friends of Frank's in Sicily ... and many other generalities.

Both Maria and Jaquie contributed to the Convent conversation. As expected, all the guests showed particular interest in the two new female faces.

For the purpose of illusion Jaquie sat three seats away from Gino, in between the Mrs. Fallone and the priest. Bit boring perhaps but perfectly understandable. She graced them with smiles and gentle movements of the head in full acknowledgement of the trivia that she was being dished.

The priest, not often in the presence of ladies of great finesse found the change of smell very exhilarating and most satisfying if not tempting. Very distinct from that of Incense used in Mass to Chanel Parfum at such close proximity.

Maria was more comfortable next to Tonio. She lived by her motto. Listen twice and speak once.

Jaquie thought, even at being a little disrespectful in complete silence, Maria would not have too many heated arguments with Tonio. It was indeed a blessing more than any priest could bestow. She looked at Maria and gave her a gentle smile from time to time. As if she was indicating to her that parties could last forever especially if they are not being enjoyed.

The partying slowed down almost to a halt by about 6 and all guests drifted out by 6.30 pm.

The four continued with "lighter drinks" until supper time, so to speak.

Gino looked at the time.

"Good God, it's getting late. Jaquie has a long way to go."

They all smiled. And Gino continued.

“Any suggestions for tomorrow.”

“I suggest, we go for a drive in your limo for a few hours. We can stop for a cup of tea and scones on the way, say 100 miles outside London and enjoy ourselves. I love High Wycombe. It will give me further intro and understanding of the Costanzo family. All the while I will see and observe how you drive, Gino. Meaning, keep on the straight and narrow, do not veer over the lanes, give the correct signals while driving, that kind of thing.”

They all laugh.

“I see. It looks as if I am going to be under the microscope. T minus 28.”

“28. What’s that.”

“Just a number I threw up in the air. T Minus 27. Stops for 2 seconds. T Minus 26 and counting.”

They all laugh.

“He is the family’s numbers man” says Tonio. “He could be quite amusing at times, even hilarious when he sheds his mask.”

“We are off. You two can continue with your chit-chat.”

With a wave of the hands only, Tonio and Maria leave.

“So what is your schedule now?”

“I will fly out on the 27th. I will look at the schedule when in Modena and check with the Agency. Get a few days off. Come back here. And then look at the career ahead depending on how we get on and what we decide. So it will be a couple more trips I would imagine.”

“Seems okay to me. You let me know your schedule so I can make the appropriate arrangements. Bearing in mind I have been given a restrictive ‘behavioural protocol’ the best thing is to now retire early after such a tiring day.”

“Okay then. Regarding hotel accommodation. I don’t need a place this flashy. Unnecessarily expensive.”

“I was thinking about that. Maybe the local Backpackers hotel down from our offices.”

All smile.

“Let me know your flight time tomorrow. I will send Tom to take you to the Airport.”

Jaquie nods and says good night.

*27 12 2022 Tuesday. Chapter 36
Section Break*

*Jaquie leaves London for Modena to re-
organize her schedule.*

It was Tuesday 27th December. Gino picks the phone. Jacquie was on the line.

“Hi Gino, I decided to get a cab. Too much fuss. Give Tom a rest. I will be getting a flight at about 10.30. Will call you back or sms you tonight. Where are you?”

“I am in the office going over some papers. Okay, I like your sense of purpose. I will look forward to hearing from you as soon as practical. Ciao.”

She was in her apartment at around 3 and decided on a nap.

She got up refreshed and pondered what next.

She called Emile and Edith. Both were told of what transpired. Both were thrilled for her. Then she mentioned to Emile the generous offer that was made. Her sister sounded relieved and thanked her.

She asked Edith if she was still driving the 15 year old Renault. The reply was in the affirmative. Jaquie told her that her late model Alfa would not be required any more if she relocates to London and it could be hers to keep. Edith joked saying Christmas is next year.

The next morning on the 28th she called in the Agency. She saw Tommaso Gentile and discussed her situation. He understood and wished her well. She indicated her flexibility on shooting to a degree. To be discussed on individual basis, the needs of the agency, timing. They agreed to give some of the less demanding shoots to Concetta. All this on one condition. She won't use the yellow Bugatti as a backdrop for any competitor of stature.

Nothing was buttoned down as yet, but the arrangements suited her.

She booked her flight to London Friday 30th December. Heathrow at 11.00 am.

She messages Gino with the details.

He replied.

“At the moment I am on the road with Filippo. Mrs. Baxter fixed everything. Savoy Hotel. Tom will be at the airport to pick you up. No cabs this time!”

“Thanks for taking the wheel today Filippo.”

Filippo smiled.

Judging by Gino's demeanour, Filippo suspected something good was on the horizon. Discreteness however meant he had to keep his eyes on the road and hands on the wheel.
