

CHAPTER 38 – BELLS WILL RING IN SCOPELLO.

*31 12 2022 Saturday. Wedding
Arrangements go in full swing. Gino calls
Maria della Chiesa. Sobbing.*

New Year's eve was a night of celebrations and the clock ticks over ...

The couple's behavioural protocol suggested by Tonio was eased somehow but was still very much in force. Like the previous day's they were somehow muted with lots of work ahead.

The days that followed unfolded in pleasure drives in the company limousine, dining in various restaurants, meeting some of Gino's friends and breaking the happy news.

Celibacy principles were religiously followed but not in the true sense of the word.

Jaquie concentrated on the wedding and the en-route travel arrangements.

She did ask Gino to call Maria della Chiesa and make all the arrangements.

One big problem, however. How are they going to break the news to Maria in Scopello? Jaquie decided it would have to be Gino. He will have to charm her and then disarm her before allowing her to choke on the news or jump for joy.

Gino, like his father loved these people and their customs and did not want to do anything to offend them.

Even more his desires to experience some of their customs when they get to Scopello and after the wedding. His thoughts drifted on the simple life sometimes he himself longs for.

Maria. Born and bred in a fishing village in sleepy Scopello. Her extensive travel was limited to a coach tour to the Vatican and a 30

minute stop at this magnificent temple of the Lord. And a visit to Mount Etna on the return trip.

Her theatre was the Sant'Agata Pescatore chapel. Referred to as Cappella in Old Medieval Latin. Her consolation and confidante was Father Giovanni in the confession booth. And a daily session with her son Fra Angelico. They used to have the simplest of breakfast together every morning.

With no disrespect, at school, Angelico was always two below the bottom of the class in his grades, but he had heart of gold. Angelico and his mother used to sit down at breakfast looking across the kitchen table at each other for one whole hour, at least. The conversation never amounted to more than 30 words.

After an hour or so, Maria had to turn her attention to the bread cutting board near the kitchen sink and prepare Don Ciccio's old-fashioned style Sicilian lunch. He never changed. Exactly like his father's expected daily ration.

A round crusty loaf cut in half, with the inside taken out turning it into an edible delicacy. Oil splashed on the inside, one onion, two tomatoes, capers, and a piece of Sicilian sausage all tossed in. The loaf was then nicely wrapped in a patterned tea towel 100% cotton with two knots on either end providing an easy way to hold on to it while taking it down to Don Ciccio.

She would throw the remains of the bread to the chickens and pigeons pecking outside, walk to sea front where Don Ciccio spent most of his days mending fishing nets.

The old tea towel cover served a dual purpose. It carried Don Ciccio's lunch and it doubled up as a protective cover placed on his baldy head. It gave him some relief from harsh midday sun. Having finished lunch, he would slip the penknife in his waistcoat pocket and then place the same towel cover on his head this time making four knots, one in each corner to keep it from slipping. He believed that traces of olive oil on his scalp kept his skin moist and shiny. Unfortunately the pillows on his side of the bed were a testimony of this. An old custom but like most, dying fast.

Don Ciccio was a happy chappy and a faithful husband. As soon as the sun set, he would take the old tea towel cover off and place it in his trousers' back pocket. He would cross the road and walk to join in a conversation with friends at the coffee shop. It served mainly black tea with a slice of lemon, 2 spoonfuls of sugar and piparelli, a type of Sicilian biscotti.

He has been a patron there for a very long time since childhood. All his father's friends were all gone with the exception of one fossil, a 98 years old man. He was wheeled there in the afternoon and remained in his chair seemingly nodding constantly towards the water with rapid regular up-and-down movement until his daughter came at seven in the evening and wheeled him back home.

The conversation with fellow fishermen was always of the same topic. The bountiful tuna and the blue seas. A gift from God.

All these thoughts of life in Scopello flashed through Gino's mind as he pondered the delicate approach he needs when talking to Maria.

Perhaps, even more delicate than the field of roses he still had to painfully navigate through for the next 20 days to reach the promised land.

The son marrying his father's lover? Scandal Numero UNO.

It could be the biggest scandal in 100 years hitting Scopello or it could turn out to be early festive days of Sant'Agata less the fireworks.

Should he get Tonio to tell Maria about this wedding to Jaquie? He decided not to. Tonio's approach is far more direct than his own. That was true, irrespective of his knowledge gathered in the confession box which never translated in the subtle approach required from time to time. His sacerdotal reputation may be damaged or even take a beating. He would never be able to visit Scopello again if that were to happen.

Finally he decided to mobilize himself mentally and attack Maria's defenses head on. It had to be a two-pronged attack.

Gino dials Maria and she answered "Pronto".

“Maria, this is Gino. Gino Costanzo.”

“Gino, I am so sorry to hear about your father. He was such a nice man. We all love him. Madonna mia che disgrazia. Such a pity”

“Please please please Maria, stop do not speak so fast.”

And he started sobbing, or rather pretending to. And kept sobbing and sobbing and sobbing.

“Madonna, Gino what happened? Are you okay? Is Jaquie all right?”

And he kept sobbing and sobbing. And more sobbing.

“I, I, I, I don’t know what to say ... Sorry Maria. I will put the phone down now and I will telephone you tomorrow.”

“Oh Gino take it easy. We already lost Frankie. We don’t want to lose you too.”

“Ciao.”

He stops the call. Perfect acting he thought. He looks up the website of the local Scopello flower shop on the Internet and orders a big bunch of flowers to be delivered to Maria that same day with a message. “From Gino”.

Two hours later Maria hears a knock on the door. A surprise delivery. She burst out crying when she read the message. She was very worried.

“It must be accident. He did not mention Tonio, maybe Tonio’s wife, maybe Jaquie something happened to her. Such a nice girl all on her own. I hope she is not in hospital”.

*01 01 2023 Sunday. Chapter 38 Section
Break*

*Gino makes a second call to Maria for her
to arrange Sicilian bandito clothes for
him.*

Gino dials Maria's number and she answers "Pronto".

"It's Gino again. I am sorry about yesterday."

"Okay, what happened?"

"We are all okay."

"Blessed is the Lord."

"I have something to tell you but I don't know how."

"Gino I am like a mother to you. What is the matter?"

"Before dad had the accident he left a recording. You know tape recording."

"Of course of course. Don Ciccio has one with songs from Caruso, Mario Lanza, also Domenico Modugno. Always playing same songs."

"In the tape Papa says he wants me to take care of Jaquie if he dies."

"Aspetta, Aspetta momento. I have to sit down. Okay now."

"Me and Tonio, we listen 10 times to the same tape."

"Yes?"

"What Papa said is he would like me to marry Jaquie. And he would like us to marry in Scopello. Sobs again. And I am afraid you don't agree."

"Well. It is your father. His wish. So do you think you love her?"

"I think so."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Okay then marry her. You have celebration here. I arrange everything. Also a secret. Maybe your father was a little. How can I say. How can I say. Silly to get a young lady like that at his age."

"We love you Gino. Jaquie is young and beautiful. I was thinking. Frankie was more than 70. But she was like a daughter to him. I know. She was taking care of him I think. He told me. He whispered in my ear. She never asked for one Euro and never want favour, or rings, or jewel, or cars. So I am sure. She must be honest. Very hard to find them like that. Not even here in Scopello. It's mauney, mauney, mauney."

"That is exactly what Papa said."

"So I can arrange the house again. Fresh sheets, pillows, clean the house. There are 3 envelopes with money behind the picture of Jesus above the bed."

"Tonio and his wife Maria will use the house."

"We stay at one of the hotels."

"Hotels are nice and clean and good food, but you understand it's not a Hilton here."

"Jaquie wants something simple. I will make those bookings myself and some guests."

"She comes live in my house. Very simple. Joking. The view is always nice from all hotels."

"Can you organise just two little flower girls?"

"I have a young friend. Carmena. She has twins. Beautiful little girls. Mamma mia, two little angels."

"Fantastic. Also you and Don Ciccio are invited. Also Fra Angelico. And Father Giovanni to give us blessings at the ceremony. At the Sant'Agata Pescatore. Jaquie likes the Ave Maria. Also Maria Costanzo."

"Fra Angelico will be happy. He never goes anywhere. Always with his mama here. And we all love the Ave Maria. Not on Don Ciccio's tape. Always Modugno number one, Claudio Villa number two."

"Flowers, bedding, and organising the local priest, Father Giovanni in Sant'Agata Chapel Pescatore."

"No problem with the bed sheets, flowers, church, priest. Nothing. But with the trousers. Trousers like Calo and Fabrizio in the Godfather film? Emmm..... I am confused. Where can I get these from? You are not a bandito."

"From the shop?"

"You are becoming nostalgic like Frankie. No more such clothes. Fashion changed. Jaquie will tell you same."

"Just get second-hand ones."

"Godfather is dead now. All clothes in Haaallywood. Those clothes are rags now cut in little pieces and wash floors or cars."

"It's my dream after seeing those boys. The ones guarding Michael. I don't need new."

"Maria. An extra 500 euros. Check with some old person who was part of the film. Maybe they give you some old clothes."

"Okay I will do my best to keep you happy with your "dream". Do you want a "Lupara" too?"

"No no. No gun."

"You forgot to give me date."

"Venti due. January 22, 11 in the morning."

“Okay. Give a kiss to Jaquie for me. A big one. Very big one. Understand. On the cheek and make a latts (lots) of noise.”
“I will ask Tonio about that.”

Maria mutters to herself. “What he mean. Ask Tonio? No understand.”
