

## CHAPTER 40 – WEDDING BELLS. AVE MARIA. GOATS and SHEEP.

*22 01 2023 Sunday. Wedding Ceremony  
takes place in Scopello.*

It was a beautiful day in Scopello. Sunny but not hot and with a gentle breeze.

This was a wedding that defied conventional customs which in a way reflected Jaqueline's character.

No bridesmaid, no traditional wedding dress, nobody to give the bride away, and driven by her husband-to-be not in a black or silver limousine, but in a fashionable Bugatti, not exactly a church wedding you expect in this part of the world.

The Ave Maria was playing well before the ceremony started and attracted quite a crowd who either wanted to hear the beautiful music, look at the bride and groom or admire the yellow Bugatti. Maybe even the young stud who stood guard.

He was the son of one of Don Ciccio's friends. Hardly gifted with a heavenly look, but blessed with a face and body like a fashionably crafted piece of art by the famous Sicilian Fashion celebrity Domenico Dolce. He stood guard a few metres from the Bugatti. He would have fitted the part most perfectly playing Michael Corleone's custodian in the movie. It would equal that of Calo's and Fabrizio's.

He was wearing a cap slanted to just above his eyebrows. He leaned motionless against the wall, his legs crossed at the ankles making the perfect picture for the most gifted of photographers. Few tourists, all young females, chewing gum in *daydream-like* slow motion and popping bubbles equally as fast, happily clicked away on their iphones cropping out the Bugatti image in most of their shots. And continuously admiring these two *objets d'art*. Two Capolavoros that could easily fetch in excess of \$8,000,000. Both unique and potentially appreciating assets.

And all this while ignoring completely the ceremony of the wedding of the century in Sant'Agata Pescatore chapel a few steps away. All happening in picturesque Scopello.

The bride and groom walked in hand-in-hand but showing the respect normally shown in the house of God and on such occasions.

The twins followed them. They looked like little angels.

Fra Angelico made sure that all the candles were all of even size and all was presentable for the occasion. The ones closest to the tabernacle, all six of them, were brand new. Especially in this chapel with a broken air-conditioning system such candles often appeared to be badly bent as if suffering from a severe form of an arthritic condition. Common business sense would have told him otherwise and leave this apparent suffering to be noticed by the groom with deep pockets. Many would have disagreed.

The best man was Mr. Fallone. The priest continued with the rest of wedding ceremony as they kissed ... for the first time. Both felt a little shaky but nothing more.

Father Giovanni performed the ceremony backed by a super short version of the mass. Both received Holy Communion, the rings were presented and duly worn on the respective fingers and soon the groom and bride were declared man and wife.

Looking at the non-traditional wedding ceremony in the chapel it would have fooled everybody to think about their celibate behaviour over the last month.

All the guests occupied the front rows. About 30 people all in all. And the usual outside crowd at the church gathered here today to witness the show.

More Ave Maria on the organ and the groom and bride now man and wife walked out of the chapel with all the pomp that could be mastered. And a good serving of applause and confetti followed.

As soon as they were out of the church Tonio approached Gino.

“Just a little thing. Maria is not in the best of moods. She still is very much a convent girl when it comes to things of the world. I start to think that a convent suits her better.”

“What happened?”

“It’s all over now. It happened last night. I put in the wrong CD that she did not approve of.”

“I will keep a serious face but I do understand. And now, with your permission, Tonio, can I kiss the bride on the cheek?”

Then Tonio, yells out with a lot of fanfare ...

“A big one Gino with a lots of noise and passion. Bravo. And the other cheek. Jaquie obliges and presents the other cheek. BRAVISSIMO.”

“Hello everybody, let’s all go to the reception hall at the Hotel.”

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*The Start of the Honeymoon.*

After a couple of hours Jaquie and Gino left for a drive. They were soon out in the open country. Most of it looked green after heavy rains in the previous weeks. A number of heavy arid patches could still be seen in certain areas manifesting the severity of the climate change.

Gino stopped the car in a shady spot and reached out for Jaquie with open arms. They hugged and kissed and tried to make up for a whole month of strict behaviour and abstinence. They explored each other's face like as if a blind person was mapping the features of a person dear to him.

"Not the most comfortable place to be in. Even a Bugatti is not big enough."

They smiled.

The occasional passer-by was local. Normally a local farmer on a donkey, or horse-drawn cart. Or a shepherd with a herd of goats or a flock of sheep.

They looked and admired the simple life around them. The "peculiar" smell from the goats was potent to say the least but it was classed as "nature smell" in Gino's nasal dictionary.

A truly picturesque country life, an exact replica in Gino's mind. Unchanged, the way it was when such tranquil scenes were more frequent while on holiday with his mother Emma as a kid. They often visited the grand parents in Catania where rural life had similar customs, consequences and rewards.

He was intrigued by animal farm smells, from horse manure, to goat's milk, sweaty mules and the like. A far cry from Jaquie's Chanel parfum, indeed his posh London surroundings.

"Now I know I can save my money. You are fascinated by the simple life Gino."

“Very much so. But Chanel Parfum is certainly the thing in London.”

“Jaquie, I feel I am reliving my childhood dreams again. I told Maria della Chiesa to find me clothes like the young men Calo and Fabrizio had on when guarding Mike Corleone after he escaped to Sicily. I will use similar clothes during our stay here, if I can get them ... only for a short while you understand while riding on a cart.”

“I want to ride on a cart. You can drive the horse or donkey. Explore country lanes, meet with farmers with flocks of sheep and goats. See some pig styes. That reminds me when I was naughty as a boy meaning, cruel to animals. It does not make me proud but I still get some mischievous giggles out it. I used to lure them with some rotten crops in my hand. They all flocked in looking at me Oink, Oink, Oink. Then whack, whack, whack. Behind the pigs’ ears. They scatter and come back. And I laughed and laughed. I let the rotten fodder drop. Pigs heads down. Whack whack. Oink, Oink.”

Jaquie’s face dropped.

“You should have been with those pigs getting whacked behind the ears.”

“Yes I am ashamed now. Really ashamed. It was fun then. Some farm kids are like that. Then Mama saw me one day; she came from behind, grabbed me and lifted me up by the ears, literally. That was a lesson learnt indeed. I still remember her eyes, how she looked at me.”

“That was cruel and nasty Gino. Not your mum, what you did.”

“Yes. ... My mama took me to confession I remember. I told the priest about the pigs. He gave me penance. 10 Hail Marys – one for each pig I whacked. He asked me to get in the box in front of him. I remember Mama panicked, came to the box running. In the meantime he grabbed my ears and pulled hard. So I shouted. She was there in time and pulled me away from him quickly. A few old people who were in the Church started crossing themselves. But now with today’s promiscuity, I understand why she panicked.”

“So only your ears? Okay next time we visit a pig sty I will have a stick in my hand ... to use on you.”

“So what’s the plan for the honeymoon? Have you figured it out? More pig styes?”

“I just told you. If you like that, it will be an experience for you. You’re always thinking outside the box. I am sure you will enjoy it.”

“Whatever pleases you I am happy. Not pig cruelty though.”

“Okay, let’s go home and check the merchandise.”

“I missed that! She said that without looking at Gino.”

“I have to watch my words in the future.”

“Good. Anyway, what was wrong with Tonio’s Maria this morning? She looked so down.”

“Tonio told me she is having a difficult transition. From the convent strict solo life to the shared life in bed. From single bed to a double bed. Unless it’s done by the book. So no fancy stuff. Also there was some CD involved which caused the big upheaval. She called Tonio ... dirty old priest.”

Jaquie smiled.

“Have you got your CD’s?”

“No need.”

A parcel was waiting for them. It was at the reception addressed to Gino. From Maria della Chiesa. He opened it up. It had a bunch of used *bandito* clothes and the traditional cap.

That night they moved to Jaquie’s room. Soon they were in the hotel consummating their marriage.

“We are all set.”

The next morning Maria della Chiesa called Gino. She gave him the name and telephone number of Luciano Merola, a local farmer. She said this person was willing to get his own cart, horse or donkey, and take him and Jaquie around seeing the Sicily he remembered as a child. She had already explained to Luciano.

So Gino called Luciano.

“Hello, this is Gino.”

“Hello Gino. Maria told me. You want to see old Sicily. My English very bad so please slowly.”

“Okay. You leave your car in garage. If not, car will disappear. I pick you up morning. I have old Fiat. I take you home meet me wife Peppina. We go on cart for ride. Many holes in road no good tarmac. I bring cushions. We see goats and sheeps. I know country lanes. Nobody goes, no tourists, no cars, only farmers and sheeps.”

“Very good.”

“Then we go home. My wife makes food. We eat. We have wine in the garden under trees. Then we go another way. Evening you see lovers and supervisors watching. Important tradition here.”

“Chaperons.”

“Then I take you home to hotel again. If you happy 200 Euros is good money. I am happy.”

“Okay.”

“I will come tomorrow in morning. Clock 9.30.”

“Ciao.”

That evening they discussed the next day’s adventure over dinner at the hotel.

“Tonio called while you were in the shower. They left just after he called. They wished us well. All is now fixed. Maria told him she will try to be a better wife ....meaning lover. All is good in the family.”

It’s a great day tomorrow. No Travel Agency can book us on such an experience.

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24 01 2023 Tuesday. Chapter 40  
Section Break

*Donkey ride. Goats, Sheep, Chaperones  
and Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. The  
Honeymoon continues.*

The next day, the 24<sup>th</sup>, they were picked up by Luciano in his old Fiat.

“There is five hundred Euros in this envelope. You are very kind.”

“Oh no. Too much. Thank you. I can take Peppina to La Traviata in Palermo. At last.”

They drove to his humble home and he introduced them to Peppina, Luciano’s wife for 35 years. He said Peppina is preparing fresh Minestrone and Caponata for lunch.

Peppina welcomed them with a big smile. Luciano handed the envelope to Peppina who thanked them again with an even bigger smile. A little boy showed his face and ran back quickly inside.

Luciano said he was his grandson.

He got his cart set up. He said he will use the donkey, because it is slower and more enjoyable for the purpose. Also the horse had a bad leg. He told them to hold on properly. They jumped on the cushions; their legs dangling at the back.

Luciano’s English was not good for explanation but he stopped a few times so they could take pictures of rubble walls, rooms that were roughly put together and used as fireworks factories or shelter for animals, hanging cactus and prickly pear trees and of course fig trees. That was Gino’s favourite fruit.

He got off the cart without even asking Luciano to stop. He went running towards a fig tree.

“No figs. Winter. All fruit in summer.”



Gino looked disappointed. He got back on the cart.

All of a sudden the serene silence was broken by the donkey's braying: hey-haw, hey-haw. Very loud, silence and again clip-clop, clip-clop and they were moving again.

Gino and Jaquie were enjoying every moment holding hands with an occasional kiss enjoying the scene that was continuously refreshed and drifting away from them.

Jaquie noticed Gino twitching his nostrils as if he sensed something pleasant approaching. And then a few bells dangling. He looked left and right and then at the front. Sure enough, way ahead a huge herd of goats was blocking the country lane with the donkey slowing down to a halt.

They had to wait for the flock to go past them. The visitors were snapping pictures like mad.

Luciano pointed at the neck of a goat and said in clear Italian pointing at the collar:

“Campane di Capra.”

And then with his fingers Luciano pressed his nostrils tight and said.

“Odore di Capra.”

Both Jaquie and Gino understood enough Italian to acknowledge.

The flock stopped. The two farmers chatted. Luciano explained that the visitors were from London and re-living some Sicilian memories.

The shepherd reached for his sack and pulled out a plastic container and motioned to one goat with breasts so big and ready that no Versace outfit would fit her. And he started milking the goat.

He handed the container over to Gino.

“Latte di Capra. Formaggio di Capra” said the shepherd.

“Capisco. Grazie tanto.”

They waited until the flock passed by enjoying every moment with Gino registering no noticeable changes from 35 years ago.

And clip-clop again.

Gino passed the milk container to Luciano who put it in the sack under the cart. At the same time indicating it was time to go for lunch.

So he turned back and they were home for lunch one hour later about 1 o'clock pm.

Peppina greeted them and indicated that the timing was perfect. They really enjoyed their lunch. The Minestrone was great and the Caponata was superb.

They went outside and sat in the shade. The smell from the Pig Sty was picking up under the Sicilian sun. Gino went for an inspection. He turned to Jaquie and indicated that no stick was needed. She joined him.

All the pigs came running to meet the new visitors. They all looked innocent enough. The big mama fat sow was lying on its side, too heavy to move.

“How could you have hurt such creatures Gino?”

“It’s a black mark on my character. Sorry again.”

Jaquie gives Gino a forgiving kiss.

So they went back and sat next to Peppina. The young boy sneaked out again, seemingly playing hide and seek.

Jaquie waved hello.

“My little grand kid, Paco. He is four.”

“Come here Paco, come, come” says Peppina.”

“Come on Paco. Come to Jaquie. Come on.”

So this time Paco made it to Jaquie and cuddled up. She asked Peppina what was wrong with his leg. Looked as if it had been broken. Paco broke leg six months ago. Not fixed good. Waiting to go to Palermo Hospital for fixing but wait, wait to save money. No father. Shot dead 2 years ago. His mother works in tomato sauce company saving.

“Quanto?”

“Quattro mila. 4,000 Euros” says Peppina.

Jaquie looks at Gino. The message was immediately understood. Gino looks at Peppina.

Gino replies in an Italian accent.

“Fixxed. Luciano give me your Scopello Bank.”

“But signore.”

“Bank Account Numero”.

“Si Si.”

Runs in. Runs out, and gives the bank statement to Gino.

“Here no understand. You read.”

Gino picks the phone and calls Filippo Fallone.

“Filippo I will SMS a Bank number account of a friend of mine in Scopello. Please transfer 5000 Euros today.”

He sms’s the number to Filippo who replies with the message “DONE”.

“Tomorrow 5000 Euros in your bank. Extra money for La Traviata Opera.”

“Grazie grazie grazie. God be with you and bring you happiness.”

Peppina looked at the heavens and started thanking her favourite saints crossing herself with every name. By last count it was five. And then, the commotion subsided.

It was time they set off again to look for the “chaperone” lane.

It was nearing five in the afternoon so Luciano indicated a move on before nightfall. Fifteen minutes later they stopped by the side of the

country lane. Soon a small group appeared following a young couple holding hands with some family members following having a general chit chat. And yet another one, this one going the opposite way. About three groups all in all, yet enough to take in some old traditional customs.

Restrictive yes, but considered essential for the preservation of a young girl's most precious virtue. It is taken very seriously in this part of the world. Maybe a little different for those enforcing the dictum, they lived by their own separate rules.

Gino was surprised he did not see any young men on guard and carrying the shotgun commonly known as Lupara. And so with their curiosities satisfied, they headed back to Luciano's house where they had a coffee and a liquor which judging by the bottle it was not used often. So they were honoured.

They stood up and thanked their guests. Jaquie gave Paco a big hug and a kiss and next time she sees him he will be playing football. Peppina explained this to Paco who was very pleased and ran and cuddled to his nanna.

So Luciano drove them back to the hotel. They said good bye to Luciano who thanked them again and again.

They went straight to their room and ordered sandwiches and tea for the night. The pure Sicilian air had taken its toll because they were fast asleep by 9 pm. A No Disturb Sign hanged on the door knob.

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