

Part Two: La Vida / The Life

Chapter Twenty-Three

Fernando and Ignacio finished their snacks and continued walking home. Gaitero was frustrated yet mesmerized by the mysterious Giuseppina Licata. His thoughts were interrupted by Zapato's voice.

"Hombre, mañana es tu día especial. La costumbre aquí es que a llegar a los dieciocho eres un hombre. Tenemos que celebrar!"

Ignacio reminded Fernando that the next day will be his eighteenth birthday. He also told him that in the United States turning eighteen marked a cultural transition from boyhood to manhood. They would need to celebrate.

Fernando had almost forgotten about his birthday because he had been so preoccupied with adjusting to his new job and new home. They two men laughed as they reminisced about their boyhoods in Asturias. Fernando suddenly remembered that Ignacio's birthday was in late October, having just turned eighteen himself. The two men were virtually the same exact age.

"Zapato, tanto lo siento que se me olvidé felicitarte de tu cumpleaños. Quizás podemos celebrar los dos mañana...vale?"

Fernando had apologized to Ignacio for forgetting to congratulate him on his recent birthday. They were born only 20 days apart and Fernando suggested that they should have a dual celebration the next day. They hugged each other in agreement.

"Viejito, despiértate! No tenemos ni un minuto para perder. La celebración empieza ahora."

Fernando was awakened by Ignacio's teasing....he was coaxing "the little old man" out of bed. Zapato was anxious for the day of celebration to begin, not wanting to waste even a minute.

Ignacio suggested that they spend the late morning and afternoon visiting the various cafes that lined La Séptima, enjoying their favorite snacks and beverages. They made a mutual decision to pace themselves, knowing the day would end at a late hour. By mid-afternoon the tired and barely sober duo returned to La Gallega, ready for a much-needed nap. The young Spaniards fell onto their beds.

"Fernando, nacistes en un día de nieve, de mucho frío. Pero siempre has tenido un corazón cálido."

"Fernando, you were born on a snowy day, very cold. But you have always had a warm heart".

As Fernando drifted off to sleep, he was sure he could hear his mother's words that she so frequently repeated to him.

Fernando and Ignacio were awakened by loud knocking at their door. Aniceto was telling them to hurry up and get downstairs. As they hurriedly washed and dressed, Ignacio confessed that he had spoken with Maruxa and Aniceto about this special day. In lieu of the normal dinner, they had prepared a variety of heavy appetizers and Spanish "fiesta" foods. They would celebrate with their fellow residents.

As they hurried down the stairs, the sound of several bagpipes filled the air. At the foot of the stairs, Maruxa greeted them with big hugs and directed them to the rear outdoor area. What followed was feasting and celebration with abandon. At one point, Ignacio challenged Fernando to demonstrate that he was worthy of his nickname, "the bagpiper from Candamo". Aniceto grabbed his arm.

"Tengo aquí una gaita asturiana. Sabes como tocar una tonada montañesa?"

Aniceto handed Fernando an Asturian bagpipe, asking him if he could play "an Asturian mountain tune". This was an ancient musical genre, resembling a chant, especially popular in the high mountains of Asturias. El Gaitero Candamín replied in the affirmative. As he began to play, Aniceto began singing. Within minutes, a tear-filled silence permeated the fiesta, and most of the partiers had been temporarily transported back to Asturias or Galicia or Cantabria.

As the final strains of music and singing ended, the thunderous applause and shouting told Fernando that he could use his nickname with pride. It appeared that he was now La Gallega's "official" bagpiper. As Aniceto embraced him, Maruxa began passing around small cups of Anís del Mono, the famous Spanish licorice-flavored liqueur made from anise seed. This signaled the end of the party.

The Saturday evening was still young. Ignacio suggested that they go to the Centro Español for more socializing and perhaps a game of dominoes. Several of the other tenants decided to join them.

The Centro was filled to capacity. The group of young men stood at the bar area near the front windows. Fernando noticed that La Séptima was packed with people as well. Young couples strolling hand-in-hand, along with families and single gentlemen filled the wooden sidewalks. More drinks were ordered, but Ignacio reminded

the group that boisterous behavior or drunkenness was not allowed here.

Ironically, just as Zapato finished talking, everyone's attention was turned to a table in the far corner of the room. Two men at the table were arguing very loudly, one apparently accusing the other of cheating in an ongoing card game. As one of the men stood with clenched fists, two of the bartenders raced over and grabbed him, escorting him out the front door. One of the other Spaniards in the group, Santiago, raised his arms in frustration.

"Vaya! Siempre hay problemas con ese Siciliano...tiene un temperamento muy corto. Lo dejan entrar aquí solo porque su padre es rico y poderoso. No es miembro, pero paga mucho para poder entrar y jugar las cartas."

Santiago had explained that the man was a Sicilian who was a short-tempered troublemaker and gambler. Though not a member of Centro Español, he was allowed to enter and play cards because he paid the club a tidy sum for the privilege. Apparently, his father was wealthy and powerful.

"Pero lo conoces bien?"

Ignacio asked Santiago if he knew the man well.

"No. Creo que se llama Ligada, o algo parecido, pero no lo conozco."

Santiago continued to explain that he did not know the man well, only that his name was Ligada, or something similar.

"Quizas Licata? El apellido es Licata?"

Fernando had excitedly asked if the man's name might be Licata. Santiago, somewhat surprised by the urgency in Fernando's voice, replied that Licata sounded right.

Fernando raced out the door. He anxiously searched the crowd for the young Sicilian. He spotted him halfway down the block to his left. He broke into a slow run and caught up with the young man. He gently put his hand on his shoulder. The young man turned around.

"Señor Licata? Soy Fernando Suárez Menéndez."

With his right hand outstretched, Fernando had introduced himself to Mr. Licata.

Chapter Twenty-Four

As the young Mr. Licata turned to face Fernando, he clenched both fists and assumed a defensive stance. Apparently, Fernando's introduction had been inaudible. As he drew back his right fist as if to throw a punch, Fernando jumped back, placing his open hands facing the Sicilian. He broke into a broad smile, attempting to diffuse the tension.

"Cu'si e chi voi?"

Licata angrily asked Fernando who he was and what did he want.

Fernando was able to recognize that Licata was addressing him in Sicilian but wasn't sure of his exact words. He wisely assumed that a quick explanation was in order. In Spanish, Fernando again introduced himself, explaining that he spoke neither Sicilian nor English. Once again, he extended his right hand as a greeting. The young Sicilian appeared to understand him. He relaxed, lowering his fists and reciprocating with a handshake. Fernando was aware that they were blocking the sidewalk and gestured to Licata to join him in the entrance alcove of a closed business. In the relative quiet and privacy of this space, Fernando continued to explain that he had witnessed the scene at the Centro Español, and a friend had identified him as possibly being a Licata.

"Si, soy Salvatore Licata, me llaman Turiddu"

In broken but understandable Spanish, the Sicilian had confirmed that he was Salvatore Licata, and is known by the Sicilian diminutive for Salvatore, which is "Turiddu".

Gaitero was relieved that Turiddu's demeanor had quickly changed and found him to have a certain charm. He went on to ask if he knew of a young woman called Giuseppina Licata and might they be related. At the mention of Giuseppina, Turiddu appeared to tense up.

"Comu si canusci a mè soru? Allura, mi dispiaci....Como conoces a mi hermana?"

In a frenzied mixture of Sicilian and Spanish, Turiddu questioned Fernando as to how he knew his sister, apologizing for initially asking in Sicilian.

Fernando quickly explained that he had never met her, but that he worked at the same cigar factory. Feeling somewhat uncomfortable continuing the conversation in their current environment, he invited Turiddu to join him for a drink, asking him if knew of a quiet cafe nearby. The Sicilian, having trouble standing erect, welcomed the invitation and pointed to a bar and cafe across the street. Fernando

gently guided him by the shoulder as they made their way across the crowded La Séptima.

As the two young men were taking their seats at a table, Turiddu, somewhat slurring his words, began apologizing for initially misinterpreting Fernando's behavior. Beneath the veneer of anger and suspicion, Fernando detected an affable young man. The Spaniard diplomatically suggested that they might both be wise to avoid any additional alcohol. Turiddu laughingly agreed. They both ordered coffee and pastries.

Fernando, remembering Ignacio's description of Giuseppina's father and his admonition to proceed cautiously, decided he would take his friend's advice to heart. He gave Turiddu a brief summary of who he was and how he ended up in Tampa. The Sicilian appeared to be interested, but Fernando wondered how much of this was due to his partially inebriated state. Just as Gaitero was wondering how to get to the main point of this meeting, Turiddu mercifully did it for him.

"Allura, te piaci a mè soru e voi canusciri a idda. Sugnu giustu?"

Turiddu asked Fernando if he was correct in that that he liked his sister and wanted to meet her. Since he blurted this in Sicilian, the Spaniard remained silent with a quizzical look.

"Te gusta a mi hermana y quieres conocerla, verdad?"

In his limited Spanish, Turiddu, with a smile, repeated his assumption. Fernando, with a smile, slowly nodded his head, reaffirming Turiddu's suspicions. The Sicilian smiled. He went on to tell Fernando that if he had a dollar for every time a young man told him this, he would be extremely wealthy.

Apparently, Giuseppina's beauty was as legendary as it was obvious. The conversation had become rather awkward, not just linguistically but also due to the subject matter. Not wanting to mention Turiddu's father, Fernando decided to use a different approach. He remembered Ignacio explaining the importance of respect within the Sicilian culture.

"Quiero respetar a tu familia y tu cultura. Por favor, cual sería la manera más respetuosa para empezar a conocer a tu hermana Giuseppina? Te pregunto sinceramente y de mi corazón."

Fernando, speaking slowly and looking directly into Turiddu's eyes, had told him that he wanted to respect his culture and his family. He also asked what would be the most respectful way to begin to know his sister Giuseppina. He concluded by saying that this request was sincere and from his heart.

The lack of response from Turiddu concerned Fernando. Had he proceeded too quickly? Had he violated a time-honored protocol embedded in the Sicilian culture? The young Spaniard felt as if he were trying to navigate a floor full of eggs without cracking any shells.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Turiddu returned Fernando's intense stare, remaining silent and motionless. For a moment Fernando's mind drifted back to childhood and the "staring contests" he would have with friends and siblings. Fernando could have claimed "victory", as Turiddu ran the fingers of his right hand through his own thick black hair. He then cupped both his hands around his mouth and looked away from the Spaniard. After a few moments, he turned to Fernando.

"Quiero presentarte a mi papá."

Turiddu told Fernando that he wanted to introduce him to his father. This was totally unexpected and caught Gaitero a bit unprepared. In his mind the elder Licata was an unapproachable and threatening man. He couldn't help but wonder if Turiddu's bravado was due to his state of partial intoxication or the fact that he had another agenda...or both.

"Como no...sería un placer."

Fernando's response was just as assertive as Turiddu's offer. He graciously agreed to meet the legendary Mr. Licata. Before Fernando could ask Turiddu when, where, and how this would happen, the young Sicilian stood up and began a frenzied attempt to tidy up his appearance by adjusting his tie and tucking in his shirt. He was clearly preparing for a hasty departure. Fernando then realized that this meeting, in Turiddu's mind, was imminent.

"Hombre, que haces?"

Fernando asked Turiddu what he was doing. He responded that the way to show a respectful interest toward a young Sicilian girl is to first speak to her father, and tonight was the perfect opportunity to do so. Gaitero nodded in agreement but questioned the lack of discretion in not having made prior arrangements with Mr. Licata. Turiddu responded that his father, in the best of circumstances, was not very approachable. He added that tonight he felt particularly emboldened to make such an introduction for a variety of reasons. The partial language barrier and the emotions of the evening aside, Fernando understood that this was essentially a rare opportunity, and that he'd

best take advantage of it. It might be his only path to meeting Giuseppina. He nodded in agreement with Turiddu.

Fernando paid their check and the two men left the cafe. Turiddu made it clear that Fernando was to follow him. They walked about two blocks west on La Séptima. At the corner of 18th St, Turiddu stopped in front of a rather large building. On the front window was written "L'Unione Italiana"... "The Italian Union". This was the social club and mutual aid society for most of Tampa's Sicilian and Italian community. On either side of the main entrance were long benches, filled with men speaking loudly in Sicilian or Italian. Several of the men stood up, walked over to Turiddu and gave him kisses on both cheeks. It was obvious that Turiddu Licata was well-known and respected in the community. He introduced Fernando to several of the men. The conversations were in very rapid Sicilian and Fernando could only determine the gist of what was being said. He assumed, and hoped, that this was merely normal polite conversation.

Turiddu gestured to Fernando to follow him into the building. It was similar to the Spanish Center but smaller. The main level, like that of the Centro Español, seemed to be off-limits to women. The room was filled with men sitting at tables. Most were playing cards, some dominoes. Turiddu gestured toward a staircase in a corner of the room. Fernando followed him up the stairs. At the top they passed

through large double doors and entered what appeared to be a ballroom filled with round tables set up for a formal dinner. The attendees appeared to be well-dressed families enjoying a quiet dinner. A string quartet provided soft background music. Candles adorned the tables. Fernando felt as if he had entered a very expensive restaurant in Havana. At the other end of the room was a long rectangular table at which were seated approximately twenty people. The young Spaniard suddenly felt terribly out of place and embarrassed, realizing that this was a private affair to which he had not been invited.

Turiddu stopped walking, gazing around the room. It appeared that he was searching for a particular group of guests. Fernando grabbed him by the arm. Not wanting to attract more attention by speaking, Fernando communicated his feelings of awkwardness to Turiddu with hand gestures and facial expressions....suggesting they should immediately leave. The young Sicilian responded by gently nudging him to continue walking along a side wall toward a corner in the rear of the room. Fernando hesitatingly did so, realizing that they were beginning to attract curious stares from the diners.

As they got to the very back of the room, Fernando noticed that a man seated in the very corner table had stood up and was hurrying toward them. As the man approached them, he grabbed Turiddu by his left

ear with one hand and by his neck with the other. He then dragged him behind a room divider immediately next to his table. Fernando discretely stepped to the side, not sure of what to do. By now, many of the guests seated nearby were aware of the developing scene. Just as he was about to make a hasty departure, he noticed a table of only women and children, adjacent to the man's table. Several of the women were elderly, dressed in rather drab black dresses. Others were quite young. One of the younger women was directly facing him. As Fernando's eyes met hers, she immediately diverted her attention to another lady seated next to her. He realized that she was Giuseppina Licata.

Before Fernando could decide what to do, someone had grabbed his arm, pulling him behind the room divider and into a kitchen, whose doors were blocked from view by the partition. In the light of the kitchen he could see that it was the gentleman who had dragged Turiddu by his ear.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Just as Fernando was pushed into the kitchen, two other men quickly approached him. They were large, burly men and were reaching into their jackets. Simultaneously, Turiddu was frantically speaking to the

first man who had grabbed him. The conversation was in rapid Sicilian, and Turiddu would occasionally point toward Fernando. The Spaniard was able to understand that the first man was Turiddu's father and that Turiddu was explaining who Fernando was and why they were there. Mercifully, the elder Mr. Licata waved away the two men who now had drawn pistols. Gaitero had never been this close to hand guns. He wisely remained silent as the pistols were returned into ominous-looking shoulder holsters.

As the armed men stepped away further into the kitchen, Turiddu's father released his hold on his son. He then turned toward Fernando. He began speaking in a soft, measured, and gracious tone.

"Por favor, perdona la estupidez de mi hijo. A veces es malcriado y no respeta a su familia. Soy Gaetano Licata."

In broken Spanish, Turiddu's father had apologized for his son's boorish and stupid behavior, explaining that he sometimes disrespects his family. He introduced himself as Gaetano Licata, extending his right hand. The young Spaniard was still trying to process the events of the last few minutes but was able to extend his hand in return. The two men shook hands, but Gaetano Licata's face showed no emotion at all. Fernando remained silent.

Glancing toward his two "assistants", Mr. Licata spoke very quickly in Sicilian. Immediately, Turiddu and Fernando were being gently escorted through the kitchen, out a rear door, and down a back staircase into an alley. One of the two men tipped his hat and nodded respectfully toward Turiddu. Gaetano Licata's "assistants" quickly climbed the stairs and reentered the building.

Turiddu looked at Fernando and began speaking rapidly in an attempt to explain what had just transpired. What followed was a disjointed mixture of Sicilian and broken Spanish. It reminded Gaitero of the ramblings of a bad liar. In this case, he interpreted it as an expression of anger, remorse, and embarrassment. It appeared that the evening of too much liquor and too much emotion had taken its toll, in many ways. Turiddu suddenly grew silent, ran toward a line of trash cans, and began vomiting profusely. Fernando turned away, sparing both himself and the young Sicilian any further feelings of awkwardness.

"Fernando, me siento mejor. Vamos."

Turiddu called out to Fernando, explaining that he felt much better and that they should go.

The two young men began walking around the L'Unione Italiana building and toward La Séptima.

When they got to the corner of 7th Ave. and 18th St. they paused under a streetlamp. By now La Séptima had few people and the row of benches in front of the Italian club were empty. Guests were starting to leave the private function at the clubhouse. Turiddu pointed to an area on the benches furthest away from the main doors of the building. They sat down and Turiddu began speaking. In contrast to his earlier frenzied manner, his voice was calm and his words measured.

In that now familiar mixture of Sicilian and limited Spanish, the young Licata confessed that his wanting to introduce Fernando to his father was less altruistic than it might have appeared. It was less of an attempt to help Fernando in his efforts to meet Giuseppina than it was a way of challenging his father. The special occasion that they had just invaded was the wedding of Gaetano Licata's goddaughter, whose father worked for Mr. Licata. In the Sicilian culture, the relationship between godparents and godchildren was a sacred one. As an act of defiance, Turiddu had refused to go to the wedding, intending to infuriate his father and disrespect both families. On a cultural level, this was a sin that exceeded most of those mentioned in the holy scriptures, and almost beyond redemption and forgiveness. The social gaffe was worsened by Turiddu's appearing in a disheveled and inebriated state, with an uninvited friend. Additionally, his father had explained to the bride's father that Turiddu's unexpected absence

was due to a case of the flu, thus further embarrassing Gaetano Licata and his family. The evening had been a social disaster for the Licata family and Turiddu was responsible.

Fernando could see the utter despair on Turiddu's face and decided that silence was his best option. He extended his hand to Turiddu, thanking him for his efforts, regardless of his motivations. Turiddu reciprocated the handshake and handed Fernando a business card for "Licata's Fruits and Vegetables". The young Sicilian stood up and began walking east on La Séptima. Fernando saved the card in his wallet and headed back home, anxious to explain to Ignacio just how memorable this special birthday had become.

As Gaitero walked north on 18th St. toward La Gallega boarding house, he couldn't help but think that the Licatas' business interests extended beyond fruits and vegetables.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

It was almost midnight by the time Fernando got back to La Gallega boarding house. He was careful not to disturb others as he climbed the stairs to his bedroom. As he was preparing for bed, Ignacio's voice startled him.

"Vaya, Gaitero. Pues dónde estabas? Estábamos un poco preocupado por ti. No he dormido, esperando que llegues a casa. Todo bien?"

Ignacio explained to Fernando that he hadn't slept, anxiously waiting for his best friend to return home. He told him that the group of guys were a bit worried, wondering where he had been and if he was OK.

Fernando felt embarrassed and apologetic that he had caused them to worry. At the same time, he couldn't help but be comforted that he had already established a bond with others in his new home. This was something he hadn't felt during his years in Havana. Perhaps the fact that Tampa was essentially an "island" in the middle of a vastly different culture encouraged people to look out for each other. In any case, he sought to reassure Zapato.

"Zapato, tanto lo siento haber sido la causa de tanta preocupación. Todo bien...te explico más mañana."

Fernando apologized for having been the cause of so much worry. He assured Ignacio that all was well, and he would explain more the next day. Fernando got into bed. Within a few minutes, the two young men were asleep.

Sunday morning dawned bright and quite cold. Fernando and Ignacio quickly washed and dressed, anxious for the warmth of the dining room, which Maruxa and Aniceto thoughtfully kept warm with a potbelly stove. Within minutes they were enjoying their coffee with milk and a hearty meal of bread, fruit and cheeses. They were soon joined by several of the men who had accompanied them to the Centro Español the evening prior.

After many questions and expressions of concern, Fernando explained that all was well, and that he had made the acquaintance of the hot-tempered young Sicilian, Salvatore Licata. He avoided any references to the fiasco at the wedding reception. Several of the men expressed concern, telling Fernando that there were many unsavory rumors about the Licata family. Most were not aware that the confrontational young man often seen at the Centro was, in fact, the son of the infamous Gaetano Licata. Fernando simply nodded with a smile, wanting to discourage any further discussion about the previous night's "adventure".

After breakfast, Fernando and Ignacio moved into the adjacent sitting area to enjoy another cup of coffee. Fernando took Ignacio into his confidence and shared the details of what had happened with Turiddu. Zapato's face went almost ashen when Gaitero explained that he had had direct contact with Gaetano. Ignacio's expression changed to one

of surprise when Fernando explained that Gaetano, though quite angry, had been quite calm and polite toward him.

Fernando took the card that Turiddu had given him out of his wallet. He showed it to Ignacio, asking him if he knew where "Licata's Fruits and Vegetables" was located. Zapato turned the card over. On the reverse side there was a very brief explanation of the location, written in Spanish, Italian, and English. Below the verbiage was a sketchy map indicating the exact location as well. Fernando had not previously noted this information, due to his hasty departure from Turiddu.

"Y por qué quieres saber dónde está la finca de Licata? Vas a abrir un restaurante?"

Ignacio had asked Fernando why he wanted to know where the Licata farm was located. He jokingly asked if he was planning to open a restaurant.

"No tenemos nada para hacer hoy, verdad? Quiero ir para ver lo que es. Tengo curiosidad."

Fernando explained to Ignacio that since they didn't have anything to do today, he would be interested in seeing the Licata farm. He was curious.

Ignacio could see that Fernando had not been deterred by the events of the previous night but was more determined than ever to find a way to meet Giuseppina Licata. Somewhat hesitatingly, he agreed to accompany Fernando to satisfy his curiosity about Licata's Fruits and Vegetables.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Ignacio explained to Fernando that according to the business card, Licata's Fruits and Vegetables was located about three miles to the east of them. This was a perfect distance for a brisk late-morning walk. It was a semi-rural area that locals referred to as "Gary". Beginning approximately six blocks east of Ybor City proper and continuing well to the east, Gary was becoming known as an area in which many Sicilian families had settled. Many of these families had established small truck farms that grew a variety of fruits and vegetables. While the harvest was used primarily to sustain the owners themselves, a portion was sold to friends and neighbors. The Sicilians and Italians had quickly earned the reputation for growing excellent produce. As they prospered, many were transitioning from working in cigar factories to opening small grocery stores that specialized in fresh produce. In addition, there were many African

American families as well as Anglos, and a few Spaniards and Cubans.

The two Spaniards walked down to La Séptima and headed eastward on foot. After several blocks, there seemed to be an abrupt end to the urban infrastructure one could find in Tampa. Wooden sidewalks gave way to sandy footpaths, in places quite overgrown with weeds. Occasionally, Fernando noticed tiny wooden houses which sat precariously on concrete blocks. He could see African American families gathered around outdoor fire pits in which scraps of wood were burning. The day was rather cool, and he imagined this was their only source of heat. Gaitero was taken aback by the primitive conditions he saw.

"Zapato, yo pensaba que no había pobreza como esta aquí en Los Estados Unidos. Yo vi esto en las afueras de La Habana, pero me quedo sorprendido encontrarlo aquí."

Fernando told Ignacio that he thought poverty like this was unknown in the United States. He had seen these living conditions on the outskirts of Havana but was rather surprised to find them here.

"Gaitero, me gusta mucho vivir en Tampa pero creo que hay, por lo menos, tres Estados Unidos. Uno para ellos cuyos familias llevan

mucho tiempo aquí, y las raíces son de Inglaterra y otros países del norte de Europa. Después otro para gente como nosotros...inmigrantes del sur o este de Europa. Al final, las migas que quedan son para gente que no son blanca, como estos pobres. En mi opinión, la realidad es que sería igual, o peor, en cualquier otro país. Aunque Los Estados Unidos no es el sueño mágico que muchas personas imaginan, es el sitio preferible para buscar una vida mejor."

Ignacio explained to Fernando that in his opinion there are essentially at least three United States. One is for those whose families have been here for many generations, and whose roots are from England or other northern European countries. Then one for folks like themselves.... immigrants from southern or eastern Europe. Finally, the remaining "crumbs" are for those who are non-white, like the unfortunate people they are looking at right now. He concluded by saying that while the United States is not the "magic dream" that many perceive it to be, it is still the best place in which to seek a better life. Rather cynically, he believed that it would be the same, or worse, in any other country.

While Fernando was taken aback with this dose of reality from his best friend, he concluded that Ignacio was probably right. This venture into the darker side of the human condition made his quest to somehow get closer to Giuseppina Licata seem trivial.

After a few minutes of walking in silence, Ignacio stopped and retrieved the business card that Fernando had entrusted to him. Looking around him, he gestured that they should turn to the left. As they headed north on a small dirt road, it appeared that the houses were becoming a bit larger and more modern. Many were surrounded by sizable tracts of land, perhaps two acres or so. On some plots there were several dairy cows. The crops, mostly green vegetables, were neatly arranged in long rows. Fernando noticed occasional stands of curious cactus-like plants bearing medium-sized fruit. The fruit was red, with prickly spines protruding from it. He had never seen such unusual looking plants. Just as Fernando was about to ask Ignacio about these strange fruits, they stopped in front of a small farmhouse. An older gentleman was sitting in a chair alongside a wooden stand loaded with fruits and vegetables for sale. Ignacio confessed that he was lost and needed to ask directions.

"Señor, por favor, hablas español?"

Ignacio asked the farmer if he spoke Spanish. His response was a hand gesture asking Ignacio to wait. The older man walked into a small barn-like structure, returning with a much younger man.

"Hola. Soy el hijo del señor. Hablo español un poco."

The younger man explained that he was the son of the older man, and he did speak a bit of Spanish. His accent clearly revealed him to be Sicilian.

Ignacio asked him directions to the Licata farm. The son explained that they needed to retrace their steps a short distance and take a left turn at a small creek surrounded by massive oak trees. Ignacio recalled seeing such a place and thanked him for his help. As they were about to leave, Fernando asked the young Sicilian about the spiky red fruits.

"Esas se llaman ficos d'India....en español, higos de India. Nosotros sicilianos también los llamamos ficorini, o higos pequeños. Espera un momento!"

Fernando was told that they were called "Indian figs", and that Sicilians also referred to them as "little figs." He asked the Spaniards to wait for a moment. He quickly returned with a paper bag with four or five Indian figs. As he handed them to Fernando, he explained that they were delicious and extremely nutritious, though quite difficult to eat due to the sharp spines and the numerous seed pods within. He suggested rolling them in wadded up newspapers to remove the spines.

Fernando and Ignacio thanked the two men for their help and generosity. After a few minutes they saw on their left a cluster of massive, moss-draped oak trees. A small creek, almost dry, ran through and beyond the stand of trees. A sign indicated that the Licata farm was down the dirt road that paralleled the creek. Somehow, they had missed the sign earlier. They turned left, heading further east. Just beyond the sign, they noticed vast stretches of row upon row of vegetables. Neatly arranged fences clearly defined the property. Quite a distance down the road they came to a dead end. Just beyond a large open gate was a warehouse-like structure. Beyond that was a three-story wooden house. The house was extremely large, with wrap-around porches surrounding the first two floors. A manicured lawn was dotted with massive oak trees. Fernando had never seen anything like this before.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Fernando and Ignacio were distracted by the distant sound of several large horse-drawn wagons turning onto the road leading to the Licata complex. Fernando suggested that they remain unseen and pointed to a particularly tall and dense stand of bushes off of the road. Though this was clearly a place of business as well as the Licata family home, Fernando preferred to remain out of sight after the fiasco of the

previous evening. He did not relish the idea of having to explain his presence on a Sunday morning.

As the wagons passed through the large open gate, seven or eight men emerged from the warehouse. Some were clearly holding shotguns. Two of the men were dressed in suits and appeared to be barking orders at the others. Fernando recognized these two as Gaetano Licata's "assistants" from the scene in the kitchen of L'Unione Italiana. Immediately after the wagons entered the complex, the gates behind them were quickly closed. The passengers quickly descended from the wagons. There were approximately 20 people in all. Many were carrying what appeared to be large pots and trays of food. As they gathered in a group, there were exchanges of kisses and hugs. As they began walking toward the house, the horses were unbridled and taken into the warehouse. Several of the men with shotguns remained standing near the closed gate.

"Dos de ellos estaban en la boda anoche. No quiero que me vean. Tenemos que quedarnos escondidos. Vamos por estos campos y regresamos por atrás de la casa."

Fernando explained to Ignacio that two of the men were at the wedding the night before and he didn't want them to see him. He suggested that they remain hidden from view by walking through the fields and returning from the rear of the house, well out of sight.

Luckily, they were able to find a path that was outside of the fenced-in and cultivated areas. It closely paralleled the creek, and the large trees and brush kept them from view. To their right was a barbed wire fence that enclosed the Licata property. As they approached the area, which was near the back of the house, they could hear lively music and singing. This area was dominated by a large patio upon which sat several very long tables. Beyond the patio, the lawn sloped slightly downward toward a large pond, almost a small lake.

One of the men with a shotgun appeared to be walking the perimeter of the fence, inside the private property. Suddenly the sound of voices startled the two Spaniards. A short distance in front of them they could see several young men walking toward them. As they drew closer, it became obvious that they were speaking English. Fernando whispered to Ignacio, indicating that they should stop spying and continue walking, but not running. As they passed the group of men, one of them waved and muttered what appeared to be a friendly greeting. Fernando and Ignacio waved back at them and continued walking away from the Licata complex.

Soon they emerged into a vast open area that was dotted with small wooden houses. Though similar to the ones that they had seen earlier, these were in somewhat better condition. They turned right onto a dirt road, heading back toward Ybor City. They encountered several small

groups of people, all of whom were speaking English. Shortly ahead was a larger road, essentially an extension of La Séptima, but still quite a distance from Ybor City. They turned right and continued toward home, having made a large circle around the Licata farm. Instinctively, they had refrained from speaking until now.

"Zapato, yo creo que esa gente estaban hablando Inglés, pero sonaba un poco diferente de lo que yo había oído en La Habana, verdad?"

Fernando explained to Zapato that he thought the people they had just encountered were speaking English, but it sounded different than what he had occasionally heard while living in Havana. Ignacio offered an explanation.

"Pues sí. Ellos son lo que llamamos "cracas". Son norteamericanos sureños que llevan muchas generaciones aquí en la Florida. Hablan con un acento muy distinto, y tienen una cultura muy distinta. Ahora, en Tampa, usamos esa palabra para describir cualquiera persona blanca que no es español, cubano, o siciliano. No sé de dónde viene la palabra, pero entiendo lo que quiere decir la palabra."

Zapato had explained that the people they had just encountered are called "crackers". They are white southern Americans whose roots go

back many generations in Florida. He added that they have a distinct culture and a distinct accent when speaking. Additionally, he explained that in the Latin areas of Tampa, the term was now used to describe any white person who was not Spanish, Cuban, or Sicilian. Ignacio admitted that he had no idea where the word came from but understood its meaning.

As the two young men continued their walk home, Fernando was reliving the past twenty-four hours in his mind. Certainly, this would be a birthday to remember. He realized he was vacillating between being a responsible adult and an impulsive adolescent smitten by a pretty girl. Today's adventure was nothing more than acting out on the musings of a young boy who thinks he might be falling in love with a young girl he has yet to meet. He wasn't sure what today's adventure was all about, other than an attempt to learn all he could about Giuseppina and her family.

"Gaitero, vamos a comer algo en Las Novedades. Yo te invito para tu cumpleaños. Es la costumbre aquí...al revés de cómo se hace en España. Vale?"

Ignacio interrupted Fernando's introspection by inviting him to eat at Las Novedades. He explained that in the US, the custom is to host friends on their birthday, the opposite of the way it's done in Spain.

Fernando graciously accepted. He and Ignacio were now in the middle of La Séptima, and they relished the familiar surroundings.

Chapter Thirty

Gaitero and Zapato found themselves almost anxious to return to the relative calm and predictability of their workweek. Though the weekend had been enjoyable and, in many ways, fruitful, they welcomed the familiarity of the Sanchez y Haya cigar factory.

Just as Fernando had punched his timecard, Julio approached him.

"Buenos días, Gaitero. Por favor, venga conmigo a la oficina del señor Castañeda. No te preocupes, todo bien."

Julio, Fernando's immediate boss, had requested that he join him in Mr. Castañeda's office. He assured him that all was well.

As they entered the manager's office, Fernando was somewhat surprised to see Belarmino Pedroso seated at a small table, along with Mr. Castañeda. He remembered Belarmino from his arrival at Port Tampa. Though only ten days prior, it somehow seemed like an

eternity had passed. Belarmino stood and extended his hand toward Fernando.

"Fernando, encantado verte. Espero que todo va bien contigo."

Belarmino warmly greeted the puzzled young Spaniard, and the two men shook hands.

Mr. Castañeda also extended a greeting and handshake to Fernando. He went on to explain that Belarmino had contacted him on behalf of some of the other employees. Apparently, word had gotten out about Fernando having been paid for an extra day the week before. Though Belarmino was not employed by the factory, he was well-known in Tampa as a community activist and labor organizer. A group of employees had contacted him, protesting what they considered preferential treatment of Fernando. Sanchez y Haya prided itself on having an excellent relationship with its employees and hoped to avoid the unionization of its workers. Belarmino was affiliated with the Cigar Makers' International Union (CMIU) and had successfully organized workers in some other factories. Sanchez y Haya had agreed to informally allow Belarmino to be a conduit through which employee concerns might be passed on to management. Though at times a bit awkward, this arrangement was generally working well for both the factory and the workers.

Mr. Castañeda explained to Fernando that he had done nothing wrong and would not be forced to return the extra day's pay. Julio apologized for having suggested the extra pay to Mr. Castañeda. The general feeling in many of the cigar factories was that the Spanish workers were often given preferential treatment over others because most of the owners were themselves Spaniards. Several workers were demanding an extra day's pay and there was concern that Fernando would now be labeled as an elitist by the other employees.

Despite the efforts to convince him otherwise, Fernando felt responsible for having offended his co-workers. He insisted on returning the extra money to the factory. His sense of fairness caused him to be embarrassed that he hadn't refused the extra pay in the first place. He was concerned that his reputation within the community was forever compromised.

Belarmino suggested that rather than returning the money to the factory, perhaps Fernando could donate it to an employee relief fund that the workers had organized. This fund was established to assist those workers who faced financial difficulties due to illness or injury. Belarmino was entrusted to administering and dispersing these monies. Fernando enthusiastically agreed. Additionally, Belarmino

asked for Mr. Castañeda's word that this type of situation would be avoided in the future. He assured him that it would.

As the men were leaving the office, Belarmino, intuitively sensing that the young Spaniard wanted to speak with him privately, gestured to step outside the main factory entrance. Concerned that he was already late for work, Fernando turned to Julio, who was standing a few feet away. Before he could speak, Julio, aware of the situation, gave him a "thumbs up" sign of permission.

"Belarmino, tanto lo siento por todo esto. Me siento muy mal."

Gaitero had expressed his regrets to Belarmino for having caused a problem. Belarmino most graciously assured him that all was well, and that he would personally speak to those workers who had complained, explaining how Fernando had generously donated to the workers' relief fund. Fernando immediately felt relieved. It was clear to him why Belarmino had become such a trusted figure and honest broker within Ybor City. He understood human nature well.

To Fernando's relief, the morning passed quickly and without incident. Tomás was cordial, never mentioning the incident that had attracted such attention. However, he remained apprehensive about facing

Ignacio during the lunch break. Certainly, his best friend had, by now, heard about what had happened.

Ignacio, already enjoying his lunch, called out to Fernando to join him. As Gaitero was unwrapping his sandwich and wondering how to broach the subject, Zapato smiled broadly.

"Gaitero. No hay ningún problema. Ellos que se quejaron saben que no fue la culpa tuya, y saben que diste el dinero al fondo de emergencia para los empleados. Un punto importante. Yo sabía lo que había pasado antes de ti. En estas fábricas de puros de Tampa no hay ningún secreto."

To Fernando's amazement, Ignacio told him that all was well. The employees that had complained know that it wasn't Fernando's fault, and that he had given the extra money to the employee emergency fund. Finally, Ignacio confessed that he had known about the extra pay before Fernando himself knew. He wanted Gaitero to know that there are no secrets in the cigar factories of Tampa.

Chapter Thirty-One

The rest of the work week went very well for Fernando. He was very relieved that his co-workers appeared to harbor no ill feelings toward him. He had had a quick introduction to the delicate nature of the constantly evolving relationship between management and the cigar workers in Tampa. With Ignacio's feedback, he now understood the concept of solidarity and equal treatment of all employees. He couldn't help but wonder if the offer of extra pay had been a kind of "test" of where his loyalties might lie. Fernando decided the best approach was to do his job as best he could, and maintain a low profile.

It was now mid-day on Wednesday of Fernando's third week at Sanchez y Haya. As the two Spaniards were enjoying their lunch, Ignacio reminded Fernando that the next day was a holiday called Thanksgiving. Zapato's voice distracted him from staring at Giuseppina, who was sitting across the loading dock from them. She was still very much on his mind.

"Mira, Gaitero. Recuerdate que mañana es un día de fiesta y no trabajamos. Es lo que llaman 'El Día de Acción de Gracias'. Vamos a comer muchísimo mañana. Maruxa siempre cocina pavos y muchas cosas más para la comida por la tarde."

Ignacio elaborated that they would not be working the next day and that Maruxa would be preparing a large afternoon meal, including the

traditional turkeys. He continued with a brief explanation of the holiday's origins as he understood it to be. Fernando found the explanation a bit odd. Though he knew very little about the history of the United States, he did know that the Spanish had founded St. Augustine in Florida many years before the English pilgrims arrived in Massachusetts. In any case, it was a holiday and Fernando looked forward to embracing a new "American" tradition.

Fernando's first Thanksgiving dinner exceeded his expectations. In addition to some familiar Spanish dishes, Maruxa had prepared a few traditional American foods, including several large roasted turkeys. Fernando especially liked the "puré de patatas", or mashed potatoes. Potatoes were a daily staple in Asturias, but he had never had them prepared in the classic American style. Always ecumenical, Maruxa had, over the years, created a uniquely delicious turkey stuffing...Cuban breadcrumbs combined with Spanish chorizo and other spices. The dinner had certainly reflected the cultural mosaic that little Tampa had become.

Fernando suggested to Ignacio that they take a much-needed long walk. After a long stroll on La Séptima, they decided to have a coffee at El Centro Español. They agreed that this would be an alcohol-free evening, as the events that occurred on Fernando's birthday were still fresh in their minds.

Gaitero and Zapato stood at the bar sipping their espressos. The "casino" room was not as busy as they had expected. This was a good thing, as they could actually converse without having to shout...a rarity in this room. Ignacio glanced at his watch, remembering that tomorrow was a workday and not wanting to get to bed too late. As he was preparing to suggest to Fernando that they head home, they were approached by a young man.

"Hola Fernando. Como estás?"

The man had greeted Fernando, enquiring as to how he was doing. It was Salvatore Licata, his right hand outstretched.

"Hola, Turiddu. Estoy bien, y tu? Quiero presentarte a mi mejor amigo, Ignacio Prendes."

Fernando returned the greeting, and introduced him to Ignacio, realizing that he had already adopted the American custom of using only one surname, instead of the customary two.

The gentlemen exchanged the usual pleasantries, commenting on the holiday and, predictably, on how they had all eaten too much.

Fernando was anxious to broach the subject of the wedding reception

fiasco but wasn't sure how to do so without embarrassing Turiddu or himself. Mercifully, the young Sicilian spared him additional anxiety.

"Fernando, todo está bien con mi padre. Aunque es muy estricto y serio, él quiere a su familia mucho, y siempre quiere mantener paz entre nosotros."

Turiddu explained that all was well with his father. He elaborated that although his dad was a strict and serious man, he loved his family immensely, and always sought to keep peace within it. Fernando was very surprised and relieved, not only for Turiddu, but for himself as well. He had been concerned that his inappropriate presence at the wedding reception, though inadvertent on his part, had forever precluded his becoming acquainted with Giuseppina. Turiddu's next statement surprised and pleased him even more.

"Mi padre quiere invitarte a nuestra casa para una fiesta. Parece que se quedó muy impresionado contigo. El día es el trece de diciembre, el día de Santa Lucía. Es una fiesta muy importante para nosotros Sicilianos. Y por favor, Ignacio, estás invitado también."

Turiddu told Fernando that apparently his father was impressed with him, despite the awkwardness of the meeting, and wanted to invite him to the family home. The occasion would be the celebration of St.

Lucy's day, which is on December 13th. He continued to explain that St. Lucy, and the festival that honors her, is very important within the Sicilian culture. He also invited Ignacio to join them.

Both men graciously accepted the unexpected invitation. Fernando's mind began racing with anticipation, although the celebration was two weeks away. After several more minutes of conversation, Turiddu excused himself and joined a card game in progress at his usual table.

Chapter Thirty-Two

"Perdón Gaitero, pero hay una llamada por teléfono para ti. Un hombre que no habla español muy bien."

Maruxa had politely interrupted the customary post-dinner coffee and conversation that Fernando and Ignacio were enjoying. She advised him that there was a telephone call for him...from "a man who didn't speak Spanish very well."

The call was from Turiddu Licata. It had been a week since Fernando and Ignacio had seen him at the Centro Español on Thanksgiving evening. The young Sicilian was calling to give him details about the St. Lucy celebration. He reminded Fernando that Ignacio was also

invited, and that a carriage would pick them up and return them to their home. Fernando was pleasantly surprised, having concluded that the invitation was perhaps the result of Turiddu having had one drink too many, and not sincere. The Spaniard thanked him, and replaced the earpiece on the large wooden telephone.

"Quien era, Gaitero? La policía te busca?"

With a big smile, Zapato had asked his friend who had called, jokingly wondering if the police were looking for Fernando.

Fernando explained that it was Turiddu and shared the details of the invitation. The Feast of St. Lucy is celebrated on December 13, and that would be one week from tonight. Ignacio, like Fernando, was a bit surprised by the phone call.

Turiddu had explained that the celebration marks the beginning of the Christmas season for the Licata family, and that semi-formal attire is suggested. The Spaniards decided this would be a good time to invest in nice clothing. Tomorrow would be Friday, a payday, and they would visit El Sombrero Blanco after work.

"Bienvenidos, Fernando e Ignacio! Como están, caballeros?"

The two Spaniards were impressed that Mr. Katz remembered their names. He had welcomed the two "gentlemen" warmly. The store was rather busy, and already decorated for Christmas, a custom that was rarely observed in Spain. They explained to Mr. Katz that they wished to purchase new suits. The proprietor smiled and gestured to follow him. As they were walking toward the back of the store, Ignacio spoke.

"Señor Katz, por qué tienes toda esta decoración para navidad en su tienda? Yo pensaba que los judíos no celebraban navidad."

Zapato had asked Mr. Katz why his store was decorated for Christmas since Jewish people don't celebrate the holiday.

"Buena pregunta. Como dicen en España: 'Es bueno rezar a los santos, pero si quieres comer, tire abono en el suelo.'"

Mr. Katz' reply made sense. He acknowledged that the question was a valid one, and answered it by quoting an old Spanish saying, "It's good to pray to the saints, but if you want to eat, throw fertilizer on the soil." It was a clever way of saying that, above all, he was a practical man. While he may have his religious views, ultimately the secular reality of financial security takes precedence. He explained that he had learned that most of his customers identified with and enjoyed Christmas, and he gives his customers what they want. Fernando and

Ignacio completely understood, and the three men broke out in laughter. It was a laughter based on their mutual understanding of the practical aspects of life.

In less than an hour Fernando and Ignacio had chosen their new suits. Mr. Katz had carefully taken the necessary measurements and promised that the altered suits would be ready by Tuesday evening, two days before the St. Lucy celebration at the Licatas. As Mr. Katz was finalizing their purchases, he asked the Spaniards more about the special event. When they explained that it was at the Licata's' home, the older man put down his pencil, took off his eyeglasses, and stared intensely at them.

"Estos trajes pueden ser las mejores inversiones que jamás harán. Gaetano Licata es un hombre que quieres como tu amigo, no como tu enemigo."

Knowing that Mr. Katz was a wise man made Fernando and Ignacio feel especially gratified at what he had just told them. The fine suits they just purchased could well be the best investment they would ever make. Mr. Licata is a man you want as your friend, not your enemy. The proprietor went on to suggest that they take gifts on their visit to the Licata home. Apparently the Licatas were regular customers of El Sombrero Blanco and he was familiar with their tastes. He suggested

they take ladies' handkerchiefs to Mrs. Licata and the two daughters. Mr. Katz gently nudged Fernando and Ignacio toward a display case nearby. He brought out three boxes of handkerchiefs, assuring them that they would be appropriate and ideal gifts. Before the Spaniards could ask the price, Mr. Katz very generously told them he would offer them at no charge, in appreciation of their substantial purchase this evening. He would have them gift-wrapped and ready when they picked up their new suits.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Thursday, December 13 was an unusually cold day in Tampa, and the cloudy skies and wind made the air feel even colder. Fernando and Ignacio were scurrying down La Séptima. The carriage that would transport them to the Licata residence would be at La Gallega boarding house at 6:30 p.m. and it was now just after 5:00 p.m. As they hurriedly passed the various store fronts, they noticed the lavishness with which American businesses promoted the Christmas season. It seemed to them that this most special holiday was very much becoming a commercial venture here in the USA. Nonetheless, they were enjoying the spirit of the season, and anticipating tonight's celebration of the Feast of St. Lucy. Fernando was taking no offense at Ignacio's teasing by referring to it as "the Feast of St. Giuseppina"!

The two men quickly bathed and changed into their new suits. As promised by Mr. Katz, the suits had been perfectly altered, pressed, and ready two days prior. Fernando remembered to gather the three beautifully wrapped boxes of handkerchiefs, eternally grateful for Mr. Katz' thoughtfulness and generosity.

As Fernando and Ignacio descended the stairs and entered the sitting area, they were greeted by whistles and applause. They looked quite dapper and their fellow boarders were quite impressed. Maruxa rushed over to them and gave each man a big hug and the customary Spanish kiss on both cheeks. Two of the older men had loaned them overcoats, appropriate on this particularly winter-like night. Turiddu had politely requested that they be punctual, as the carriage would be making several stops to pick up other guests as well. Proud of their usual punctuality, they donned their overcoats and waited on the front porch.

A few minutes later the unmistakable sound of many horses stepping in unison caught their attention. A very large carriage drawn by six large horses stopped in front of La Gallega. Fernando and Ignacio walked toward the street. Two men were conducting the carriage. One descended and tipped his hat at the two Spaniards. He was one of the men Fernando had "met" that awkward night at L'Unione Italiana. This

time he smiled and gestured toward the carriage. Mercifully, the carriage was partially enclosed and offered protection against the unusual weather. As Fernando and Ignacio entered, they politely tipped their hats at the other guests. The carriage pulled away and was soon headed eastward on La Séptima.

There were approximately 12 other guests on board the carriage. All were speaking Sicilian or that other language that Fernando had noticed on several occasions, still curious what it could be. After two more stops, they arrived at the Licata home. As they entered the complex, they saw many other smaller carriages. Apparently, this was a large affair with many invited guests. Their carriage came to a halt near the warehouse building.

Fernando and Ignacio politely allowed the other guests, many of whom had children or were older, to descend ahead of them. The two men who had driven them escorted them away from the warehouse area and toward the Licata family home. By now it was pitch dark. The path leading up to the house was lined with large candles which had been placed into small wooden boxes filled with sand. As they got closer to the house, they could see that the massive front porch, as well as every window, was adorned with candles. As the night was particularly dark, the flickering of the candles produced an effect that was almost other-worldly. Fernando and Ignacio, instinctively

speaking in hushed tones, agreed that they had never seen anything quite like this.

Shortly ahead of them was the end of a line of guests who had queued up to greet the hosts standing just inside the massive front door. This receiving line was moving rather quickly and as they got closer, they saw Gaetano and, presumably, Mrs. Licata next to him. Beyond them stood four younger people, one of whom was Turiddu. It was clear that the guests ahead of them in line were close friends and relatives of the Licatas, since the greetings that were being exchanged were of a familiar nature...warm hugs and kisses and animated conversation. Suddenly Fernando felt a bit apprehensive, wondering if Mr. Licata would remember him from that now infamous initial meeting. Surely, Turiddu was honest when he said that his father had suggested inviting them to the celebration, or had Turiddu once again sought to challenge Gaetano's authority by having uninvited guests?

To his relief, just as he was approaching Mr. Licata, Turiddu rushed over, placed his arm around Fernando and turned to his father. Gaetano Licata looked at the two Spaniards and smiled warmly, extending his right hand.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Fernando and Ignacio returned the friendly greeting from Gaetano, each shaking hands with the elder Licata. No one mentioned the unfortunate scene at the wedding. Turiddu, with his left arm around Fernando's shoulder, gently guided him further down the receiving line.

"Mamá, estos son mis amigos, Fernando Suárez e Ignacio Prendes. Caballeros, quiero presentarles a mi madre, Señora Sebastiana Schiro Licata."

Turiddu introduced the two Spaniards to his mother, Sebastiana Schiro Licata. She politely smiled and nodded gently. Fernando couldn't help but wonder if she remembered him from the wedding but decided to focus on this more pleasant evening.

Fernando handed Sebastiana one of the gifts and expressed gratitude that he and Ignacio had been invited to her home. In her very broken Spanish she warmly thanked him, looking a bit surprised at their thoughtfulness. Fernando found himself hoping that this might make up for their disastrous first meeting.

Fernando noticed that he and Ignacio appeared to be the last two guests, as Gaetano had closed the front door and began walking into the massive living room to socialize with his guests. Fernando quickly

glanced to his right, catching a glimpse of Giuseppina, hoping he wasn't being too obvious. He became aware that his hands were perspiring and discretely rubbed his right one against his pants.

"Rosario, estos son mis amigos Fernando e Ignacio. Mi hermano, Rosario"

Turiddu introduced the two men to his older brother, Rosario. He was a large burly man and he returned a smile that appeared to be somewhat forced and inauthentic. Fernando wondered if perhaps he had been at the now infamous wedding reception and harbored some resentment toward him. Before he could ponder this any further, Rosario left and joined the other guests.

"Fernando e Ignacio, estas son mis hermanas Rosa y Giuseppina. Hermanas, mis amigos Fernando Suárez e Ignacio Prendes."

Turiddu introduced the Spaniards to his two sisters, Rosa and Giuseppina. Fernando was impressed that he was now referring to both Ignacio and him as "friends", since it had been only a few weeks since they met. Sebastiana had quietly walked over and was standing between and just behind her two daughters.

Speaking simultaneously, both Fernando and Ignacio expressed their pleasure at meeting them. Fernando desperately tried to not focus on Giuseppina while ignoring Rosa. The two young women were very different from each other, and no one would reasonably assume they were sisters. The elder daughter was a large, though well-proportioned woman and had a rather "matronly" look about her. Giuseppina, as Fernando had noted on many occasions, was strikingly beautiful, in a gentle and demure way. Her eyes were a deep shade of blue, and her skin was a milky white.

Both young women smiled but did not speak. Mr. Katz, familiar with the various cultural subtleties of his customers, had coached Fernando and Ignacio on the proper protocol. Rather than addressing the young Licata sisters directly, Fernando, with the remaining two gifts in his hands, looked directly at Mrs. Licata.

"Señora Licata, ¿podemos ofrecer, con respeto, estos regalos a sus hijas?"

In Spanish, and speaking for both of them, Fernando had asked Sebastiana Licata if they could, with respect, offer gifts to her daughters. Mr. Katz had emphasized that the second most important thing in Sicilian culture is respect. The most important is the family. With some assistance in translating from Turiddu, Mrs. Licata glanced

at Rosa and Giuseppina, and then smiled at Fernando and Ignacio. She nodded in the affirmative.

Ignacio handed one of the handkerchief sets to Rosa, and Fernando passed the other one to Giuseppina. This was not spontaneous, by any means. After Mr. Katz' coaching, the two young men had "rehearsed" this ritual several times, in the privacy of their room at La Gallega.

Rosa and Giuseppina gracefully accepted the beautifully wrapped gifts. For the first time, Fernando heard Giuseppina's gentle voice as she, along with Rosa, responded with "Grazie""Thank you."

Mrs. Licata collected the unopened gifts from her daughters and passed them on to a maid who was standing nearby. She gracefully gestured to everyone to join the other guests in the living room.

Chapter Thirty-Five

As Fernando and Ignacio entered the large living room, they noticed that Mrs. Licata and her two daughters joined a group of ladies seated in a far corner of the room. In the center of the room was a massive oak table upon which sat an incredibly large amount of food of all

kinds. The atmosphere was ethereal, as the gas lamps were turned down low, creating dancing shadows along the walls and ceiling. Several large oak logs burning in a huge stone fireplace provided the perfect amount of additional light. This also served to warm the room, both literally and figuratively. A tall, beautifully decorated Christmas tree was in a corner of the room to the left of the fireplace. Fernando was enthralled, never before having seen a Christmas tree. This was a custom that had not taken root in Spain, and was just becoming popular in Cuba. His trance was broken by the sound of Turiddu's voice.

"Amigos, ven conmigo. Quiero explicar algo de nuestras costumbres sobre Santa Lucía."

Turiddu, in a particularly festive mood, had put his arms around Fernando and Ignacio. He asked them to follow him, as he wanted to explain some of their customs having to do with St. Lucy's day. He guided them toward a table that was between the fireplace and the group of Sicilian women sitting together. Many guests were lining up to gain access to the table. Turiddu took the Spaniards around the line, approaching the table from the side. As they passed near the group of sitting women, Fernando glanced at Giuseppina. As their eyes met, she broke into a large smile, then quickly averted her eyes.

Upon the table sat a small altar featuring a statue of St. Lucy, adorned with flowers. Surrounding and below this were dozens of small votive candles which had been lit. In the center was a huge bowl filled with a type of porridge. Guests were serving themselves, garnishing the porridge with a variety of nuts and dried fruits sitting in smaller bowls. At the end of the table was a large wooden box with a slit on the top. Periodically a guest would slip a sealed envelope into the slot.

Turiddu explained that St. Lucy is considered the patron saint of light and vision, hence the numerous candles. Due to a complex, and often erroneous, interpretation of history and astronomy, her birthday, December 13th, is also celebrated as the longest night of the year. The traditional porridge is called "cuccia" in Sicilian and consists of wheat berries cooked with ricotta cheese and sugar. Legend has it that a shipload of wheat saved thousands from starvation during a famine in Sicily in the 16th century, having arrived on her birthday. Turiddu prepared a sampling of cuccia for his friends. They found it tasty and vaguely reminiscent of the iconic Asturian rice pudding. Turiddu explained that the envelopes that were being left at her altar are monetary donations intended to help the hungry and the blind. Traditionally, in Sicily, the celebration is not as elaborate as this. Most families celebrate with a simple family dinner of cuccia and quiet meditation. Turiddu explained that as his father had prospered, he had

turned the Licata celebration into a large affair signaling the beginning of the Christmas season.

The Spaniards were captivated by these beautiful traditions and honored that they had been invited. Fernando couldn't help but think that somehow Turiddu had been instrumental in his having been invited. It seemed that, as opposed to his older brother Rosario, Turiddu was somewhat of a "loner". As they made their way around the room, very few guests would approach the young Sicilian, whereas Rosario always seem to have an entourage about him. Perhaps Turiddu had earned a reputation as unapproachable. In any case, Fernando felt that a strong and special bond was developing between Turiddu and him. This allowed him to comfortably confide in Turiddu.

"Turiddu, quiero hablar con tu hermana, Giuseppina. Cómo puedo hacerlo sin ofender la familia? Quiero que me ayudes."

He told Turiddu that he wanted to speak to his sister without offending the family and requested that Turiddu assist him.

Turiddu discretely pointed toward the group of women seated together. He explained that this was a time-honored Sicilian way of protecting their innocent young ladies against the improper overtures

of anxious young men. The concept of innocence and virginity until marriage was deeply ingrained within that island culture. Mothers, grandmothers, and single aunts formed a formidable wall which needed to be approached cautiously. Turiddu suggested that they approach as a group, addressing the older women first, keeping the conversation impersonal and pleasant. The young Sicilian gestured to Fernando and Ignacio to follow him.

As they approached the women, Turiddu addressed his mother in Sicilian. Ignacio, having developed a cursory familiarity with the language, relayed, in a low voice, a rough translation. He explained how he had shared the history of Santa Lucía and that the Spaniards enjoyed the cuccia. This seemed to please her and she went on to introduce the other older women to Fernando and Ignacio. With Turiddu and Ignacio translating as needed, they were soon emerged in polite and spontaneous conversation...with the exception of Rosa and Giuseppina.

Mrs. Licata turned toward Giuseppina. After a brief exchange in that "other" language that sounded absolutely nothing like Sicilian or Spanish, Turiddu turned toward Fernando and whispered.

"Mi madre comentó a mi hermana que ella sabe que ustedes trabajan juntos y quizás han hablado en la fábrica. Giuseppina contestó que sí,

trabajan juntos, pero nunca han hablado porque están en diferentes departamentos. Mi madre después dijo que entonces esta noche sería una buena oportunidad para hablar un poco. Para mi, esto significa que ahora puedes hablar directamente con ella. Es una forma de permiso."

Turiddu explained that his mother had told Giuseppina that she knows she and Fernando work together and perhaps they have spoken at the factory. Giuseppina replied that they did work together but they had never spoken since they are in different departments. Mrs. Licata then commented to her daughter that tonight would be a good opportunity to talk. Turiddu said that this was sending a signal, and that it was appropriate for him to speak directly with Giuseppina.

Fernando seized this opportunity. In Spanish, he asked her now she liked working at Sanchez y Haya. In surprisingly good Spanish, she responded that she enjoyed it very much. Complimenting her on her excellent Spanish, Giuseppina told him it was an unexpected benefit of working primarily with Spanish women. As they continued in warm but impersonal conversation, Turiddu and Ignacio excused themselves to mingle with the other guests.

It appeared that Fernando had garnered the approval of the Licata family. For the young Spaniard, January 6th, "Día de Los Reyes" or

the "Feast of the Three Kings", had arrived early. This holiday is the day when Spaniards receive their Christmas gifts.

Chapter Thirty-Six

"Gaitero, parece mentira que solo hace tres años que llegastes a Tampa. Tanto ha pasado....cosas buenas."

Ignacio told Fernando that it was hard to believe that only three years had passed since his arrival in Tampa. So much had occurred, most of it good.

Fernando couldn't respond because Ignacio was anxiously adjusting Fernando's tie, making it almost impossible to speak. The two Spaniards were not familiar with formal attire, but the helpful Mr. Katz had generously included free lessons with their tuxedo purchases.

Sunday, December 13, 1903 was, appropriately, a cold and cloudy day. It was St. Lucy's Day, and reminiscent of the day, exactly three years ago, that Fernando and Giuseppina had begun their courtship. Gaetano and Sebastiana Licata approved of Fernando and annointed the romance between him and their younger daughter.

As Ignacio continued to nervously adjust Fernando's tie, Fernando pushed his hand away.

"Por favor, Zapato! Estás más nervioso que yo! Soy yo que se casa hoy, tu no!"

Jokingly, and with a broad smile, Fernando reminded his best friend that it was he who was getting married today, not Ignacio! Both men broke into laughter and hugged each other warmly.

As the relationship between Giuseppina and Fernando developed, Fernando sought and received permission from her parents to propose marriage. Giuseppina readily accepted his proposal. Mr. Licata then offered to bring Fernando into the family business, but Fernando respectfully declined. He preferred to demonstrate that he could attain financial stability on his own. Still employed at Sanchez y Haya, Fernando had worked his way up to assistant manager of personnel. This further impressed Giuseppina's father. His literacy, work ethic, and ability to get along well with the other employees had served Fernando well.

"Bueno, Gaitero. Tenemos que irnos, porque nos esperan en la iglesia"

Ignacio reminded Fernando that they needed to go because others were waiting at the church.

Maruxa and Aniceto were already dressed and waiting on the front porch. Maruxa, in tears, rushed over to Fernando and warmly hugged and kissed him. He had honored the couple by asking that they serve as his "parents by proxy" during the ceremony and dinner afterward. Considering them far more than his landlords, Fernando was grateful for their love and friendship since his arrival in Tampa.

As the carriage made its way from Ybor City to downtown Tampa, Fernando was deep in thought. Earlier in the year he had decided that he was financially prepared to enter into marriage. With the Licatas' approval they considered which Sunday would be best. Fernando attributed it to good luck, but Giuseppina felt it was divine providence that St. Lucy's Day, December 13, would fall on a Sunday. The decision was made.

Sacred Heart Catholic Church occupied a modest wooden building in downtown Tampa, the corner of Florida Ave. and Twiggs St. As the carriage stopped in front of the church, hundreds of guests were filing into the building. Fernando and Ignacio hugged Maruxa and Aniceto and handed them off to one of Giuseppina's cousins from New Orleans who was serving as an usher. The two Spaniards entered the

church through a side entrance. Father Conde greeted them. He and Father Amorelli would be conducting the wedding mass. They joined the waiting groomsmen. Ignacio was, of course, Fernando's best man. The others consisted of Turiddu and Rosario, Giuseppina's brothers, and José and Manolo, Fernando's friends. The men took their positions to the right of the altar. The church was completely full. Fernando smiled at Maruxa and Aniceto, who were seated in the front row to his left. Maruxa began crying, and Aniceto rolled his eyes.

A brief silence followed the final strains of the Ave Maria. The pipe organ was at maximum volume as Wagner's wedding march filled the church. At the end of the procession of bridesmaids Fernando could see Giuseppina, escorted by her smiling father. As they approached the altar, Gaetano lifted her veil, kissed her on each cheek and passed her hand to Fernando's hand. Mr. Licata then leaned forward and whispered to Fernando.

"Ahora tengo tres hijos."

The elder Licata told Fernando that he now has three sons. Fernando smiled and thanked him.

Gaetano had rented the entire building of L'Unione Italiana for Giuseppina and Fernando's wedding reception. The upstairs ballroom

had been reserved for a formal dinner and dancing. The casino downstairs was set up for the traditional St. Lucy observance later in the evening.

As Fernando and Giuseppina took their seats at the head table, Fernando couldn't help thinking about the irony at hand. It was in this very room, three years prior, that he had first "met" the Licata family. His trip down memory lane was interrupted by the tinkling sound of a spoon hitting a water glass. Gaetano Licata began speaking in Sicilian, welcoming the guests. As prearranged, Ignacio followed by welcoming the Spanish- speaking guests as well. Midway through dinner, Ignacio delivered, in Spanish, a most eloquent testimonial to his best friend and his bride. Turiddu translated into Sicilian.

As coffee and wedding cake were being served, the bride and groom circulated among the guests, greeting friends and relatives. To Giuseppina's wedding gown was sewn a large silk pouch. At every table someone would place an envelope containing money into the pouch. The entire wedding had been unfamiliar to Fernando, as it was a combination of Sicilian tradition and modern American customs.

After several hours of dancing to traditional Sicilian and Spanish music, many of the remaining guests went downstairs to the casino. Father Amorelli offered a special blessing honoring St. Lucy.

Afterward, a second dessert of *cuccia* signaled an end to the evening of celebration. Giuseppina, accompanied by her sister Rosa and other women, had gone to change from her bridal gown into her travel clothes. Fernando, Gaetano and Turiddu were sitting at a table in the now nearly empty room. With Turiddu's help in translating, they reminisced about the previous three years. Gaetano reaffirmed how fond he had become of his new son-in-law.

Gaetano went on to explain that he was impressed with Fernando's determination to meet Giuseppina. He was even more impressed that Fernando always respected her and the Licata family. He also valued Fernando's wisdom and discretion in not asking for details about the family business. However, Fernando was now part of the family and he wanted no secrets between them. Mr. Licata asked Fernando to assure him that what he was about to share with him would be kept in strictest confidence. Fernando nodded in the affirmative.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

With Turiddu translating, Gaetano explained that he and his family immigrated to New Orleans in the late 1880s. Like so many of his fellow Sicilians, he was able to find work cutting sugar cane in the fields of south Louisiana. The work was extremely difficult and

conditions very harsh. The workers were underpaid and mistreated. As a result of this, Gaetano and others attempted to organize labor unions. In response, the plantation owners, with the help of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), organized vigilante groups and lynched many of the activists. Several of Gaetano's friends and relatives lost their lives. In some cases, even the police assisted the KKK. Gaetano managed to avoid capture and eventually he and his family were able to come to Tampa. After working for a short time in a cigar factory, Gaetano was able to buy some land in Gary. His goal was to establish a farm and prosper by selling fruits and vegetables to the growing immigrant community in Tampa. His experiences in Louisiana as well as in Sicily had fostered a distrust of authority. He wanted he and his family to be self-reliant.

Shortly after the Licatas had established their farm, the local KKK burned their fields, as well as those of other immigrant neighbors. Originally founded in 1866, the KKK was formed to resist the policies of the Reconstruction era, targeting the newly freed former slaves. Over the years their agenda expanded to include acts against Catholic, Jews, and immigrants in general. Rather than going to the police, Gaetano organized a group of Sicilian men and retaliated against some of the local KKK members. Several of the Klan members were killed in the process. The KKK in the rural areas

outside of Tampa was not as powerful and organized as that in Louisiana. The response was effective. Soon, it was understood that Gaetano Licata was a man to be taken seriously, a man who would fight back to protect his family and neighbors.

Mr. Licata told Fernando that, as a token of gratitude, his neighbors offered money and a share of their crops. As time went on, Gaetano was anointed as the "leader and protector" of the local community. As more immigrants moved into the area, Gaetano explained the situation and strongly suggested that they purchase "an insurance policy" from him. In essence, Gaetano Licata became the de facto law enforcement, not only in Gary, but in parts of Tampa proper as well.

Mr. Licata elaborated that he had seen a similar system work very effectively in and around his native Bivona, Sicily. Wealthy landowners had tried diverting the water supply away from small farms in order to force peasants to abandon their lands. The wealthy would then purchase them at very low prices. This was the basis of the emergence of the "Cosa Nostra" or "Our Thing" organized crime in Sicily. Essentially, it offered an alternative to traditional law enforcement, which was often under control of the wealthy. He confessed his disillusionment when he discovered that this was also true in some parts of the United States.

Fernando listened intently, remaining silent. He knew that when dealing with Mr. Licata, listening is always better than speaking. There was a warm side to Gaetano, but Fernando also understood that the Licata business had morphed into a bit more than his father-in-law was offering. The word around Ybor City was that the purchase of a Licata "insurance policy" had become obligatory, not optional. Those who declined might suddenly experience a fire. Uncooperative business owners would hear of their customers being assaulted. Fernando had grown to love Gaetano, but wanted to maintain some distance from the family enterprise. He knew that the "fruits and vegetables" part of the company was simply a front, a means of maintaining visibility and influence. Additionally, Gaetano truly enjoyed farming. It was also common knowledge that the Licata illicit business interests had begun to expand well beyond local extortion.

Fernando, remaining silent, embraced Gaetano warmly.

Giuseppina, along with her mother and her female entourage, entered the room. The few remaining guests approached them, embracing and exchanging kisses. Within a few minutes, all of the wedding guests had departed. Giuseppina, uncharacteristically animated, approached the men.

"Pina, estas más guapa que nunca. Ahora voy a cambiarme de ropa. Necesito apurarme porque el barco sale a las once y media."

Fernando, now addressing his wife by the diminutive for her name, told her that she looked prettier than ever. He announced that he had to hurry and change clothes because their ship leaves at 11:30 pm. It was now just after 8:00 pm. The Spaniard couldn't help feeling grateful that Giuseppina spoke excellent Spanish, otherwise their relationship might not have flourished.

The Licatas, among many other gifts, had insisted on organizing and paying for a two-week honeymoon trip to Havana. The steamship "Olivette", a sister ship to the "Mascotte" that brought Gaitero to Tampa, awaited them at Port Tampa. They had a reservation for the luxury suite. Fernando felt somewhat conflicted to have accepted such an extravagance. However, Gaetano understood and respected his son-in-law's inclination to prosper on his own, a sentiment shared by Giuseppina.

The H. B. Plant railway operated a late-night train timed specifically to connect with "Olivette". Fernando and Pina, accompanied by her family, along with Ignacio, Maruxa, and Aniceto formed a procession as they walked the two blocks to the Ybor City train station. Several of Gaetano's "helpers" had taken their luggage earlier.

As they were boarding the train, Sebastiana embraced her daughter tightly.

"Mè figghia, speru la spiranza sunnu comu semu."

Piina's mother had told her, in Sicilian, that she hopes her daughter is as happy as they are.

Giuseppina Licata Suárez responded with a smile. She and Fernando hugged their friends and relatives and boarded the train.