



That Summer in Sicily: A Love Story

By Marlena de Blasi

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

“At villa Donnafugata, long ago is never very far away,” writes bestselling author Marlena de Blasi of the magnificent if somewhat ruined castle in the mountains of Sicily that she finds, accidentally, one summer while traveling with her husband, Fernando. There de Blasi is befriended by Tosca, the patroness of the villa, an elegant and beautiful woman-of-a-certain-age who recounts her lifelong love story with the last prince of Sicily descended from the French nobles of Anjou.

Sicily is a land of contrasts: grandeur and poverty, beauty and sufferance, illusion and candor. In a luminous and tantalizing voice, *That Summer in Sicily* re-creates Tosca’s life, from her impoverished childhood to her fairy-tale adoption and initiation into the glittering life of the prince’s palace, to the dawning and recognition of mutual love. But when Prince Leo attempts to better the lives of his peasants, his defiance of the local Mafia’s grim will to maintain the historical imbalance between the haves and the have-nots costs him dearly.

The present-day narrative finds Tosca sharing her considerable inherited wealth with a harmonious society composed of many of the women—now widowed—who once worked the prince’s land alongside their husbands. How the Sicilian widows go about their tasks, care for one another, and celebrate the rituals of a humble, well-lived life is the heart of this book.

Showcasing the same writerly gifts that made bestsellers of *A Thousand Days in Venice* and *A Thousand Days in Tuscany*, *That Summer in Sicily*, and de Blasi’s marvelous storytelling, remind us that in order to live a rich life, one must embrace both life’s sorrow and its beauty. Here is an epic drama that takes readers from Sicily’s remote mountains to chaotic post-war Palermo, from the intricacies of forbidden love to the havoc wreaked by Sicily’s eternally bewildering culture.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In her fourth Italian memoir (after *The Lady in the Palazzo*), American writer de Blasi utilizes her personal narrative as merely bookends for a larger story. In 1995, De Blasi and her Italian husband sought a place to stay in the Sicilian mountains and were directed to the Villa Donnafugata, a grand hunting lodge populated by widows, farmers and an imperious mistress: Tosca Brozzi. When she was nine, Tosca was traded, in exchange for a horse, to a feudal prince, who took her to live with his wife and their two daughters. On her 18th birthday, she became the *puttanina* (mistress) of the prince, Leo (then exactly twice her age), and they lived together in an accepted arrangement. After WWII, Leo set about modernizing his estates, asking Tosca, a bookworm, to educate their children. The modernization brought down the wrath of the Sicilian mafia, and one day Leo simply disappeared, leaving Tosca an heiress. Eventually she modified Leo's reformist plans, developing the extraordinary community that the author and her husband stumble upon. This book reads like a suspense novel complete with a surprise ending, and though Tosca's story is compelling, it's in De Blasi's telling of it that the true magic lies. (*May*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Strangers seldom wander into the mountainous wild at Sicily's heart. The locals, having resisted repeated waves of invaders, maintain their own traditions in defiance of the outside world. So when de Blasi and her Venetian husband trek into Sicily's core in search of background for a travel guide, they discover a world much removed from modern life. Persevering in what seems a fruitless search, they finally stumble upon the Villa Donnafugata, an old wreck of a castle presided over by an imperious woman called Tosca. The villa has become a refuge for widows from the region. It also houses a birthing clinic, vital to the mountains' isolated women. The residents eat well and heartily, the leftovers distributed to the local town's poor. De Blasi uncovers Tosca's past, an extraordinary tale of passion and love stretching over decades of the twentieth century. Admirers of this author will relish her latest volume. --Mark Knoblauch

Review

"An extraordinary tale of passion and love stretching over decades of the twentieth century."—*Booklist*

"A marvel . . . a fragrant tale of life and love in the mountains of Sicily."—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"This book reads like a suspense novel complete with a surprise ending, and though Tosca's story is compelling, it's in de Blasi's telling of it that the true magic lies."—*Publishers Weekly*

"Mesmerizing . . . riveting . . . Brilliantly crafted, the story lingers, thoroughly haunts beyond the final page."—*Providence Journal*

"The great Marlena de Blasi writes fairy tales for grown-ups."—Adriana Trigiani, author of the Big Stone Gap novels

"A taste of old-world Sicily with this story of love among the almond blossoms."—*Christian Science Monitor*

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From reader reviews:

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Marilyn Oxford:

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