

**“What happens in Tuscany stays in Tuscany.”** Oh really? Well, that is what Marissa Dodd’s architect husband tells her just before she is about to depart Roslyn, Long Island for a Tuscan cooking school in the summer of 2014. In essence, he is giving her a free pass to have a mid-life fling during her three weeks of cooking classes, emphasizing that she will be more than 4,000 miles away, so whatever might happen wouldn’t really hurt him. The attractive forty-three-year-old former book editor, already an excellent cook, is seeking to perfect her culinary skills and intends to write an Italian cookbook. She is not interested in having a fling. Yet, she soon discovers that romance is unavoidable because Italy truly is a “romantic place.” All is wine and roses until there is a murder at the school and she becomes one of the prime suspects who is warned by the relentless Detective Montefusco that if she does not cooperate, fully, she will be the next Amanda Knox! In addition to romantic situations and murder, various Tuscan towns are interwoven into the storyline. These include Lucca, Siena, Pisa, San Gimignano and Florence. Naples and Sicily are also featured, along with Roslyn, Long Island and Manhattan.

### ***Chapter 1: Planning a Trip***

**Marissa stared at the light blue wall** behind her home office computer, giving her tired eyes a rest after having just completed the lengthy and cumbersome registration process for two cooking classes. These were no ordinary classes – oh no! The classes were not to be held in a local cooking school or in a school in Manhattan; rather, they would be in Tuscany in a school just outside of the walled city of Lucca, thereby fulfilling her near-lifelong dream of studying Italian cooking in Italy. Little did she know that she was about to embark on a life-changing adventure. Navigating the cooking school’s website had not been easy for her despite her being fairly computer-literate; but now she was able to relax, happily envisioning herself in that beautiful region of Italy, taking in the sights and enjoying *la dolce vita*, while learning the fine points of Tuscan cooking.

She was thinking about celebrating with a glass of wine – Chianti, of course - - when the phone rang.

“Hi Paul, are you still at work?”

“No, I was actually able to get out of the office at ten to six. But, as usual, I’ve brought some work home with me. I’m on the 6:16 train out of Penn Station, so I should get home by seven.”

“Oh, good. You’ve been working too hard, lately.”

“Yeah, working as an architect can be very demanding. I was lucky to get out of the office early, today, but I’m sure that for the rest of June, I’ll be in the office until eight, or later...Deadlines, deadlines, deadlines...and clients that think they own you!”

“Well, I’m all set with the cooking school in Lucca. I just received my registration confirmation via e-mail after spending a lot of time wending my way through the school’s website. Italian websites don’t seem to be as user-friendly as American websites.”

“Well, you managed to do it, anyhow. Great!”

“Call me when you are about ten minutes from the station...*Ciao, Paolo.*”

“Oh, you’re already in Italian mode...*Ciao, Marissa.*”

The Long Island Railroad commuter train pulled into Roslyn Station at 7:02 – only two minutes late. A few minutes later, Paul waved at Marissa who was seated behind the wheel of her two-week old metallic gray BMW 328i. He got into the car, leaned over and gave her a perfunctory peck on the cheek. She smiled, slipped the 2014 *Bimmer* into first gear, and slowly pulled out of the chaotic parking lot.

“You look exhausted, Paul. Rough day?”

“Oh, yeah...very hectic.”

“So, will you be able to join me in Tuscany after my three weeks of classes?”

“Three weeks? I thought the course was only two weeks.”

“Oh, I decided to take a one-week desserts course. The course is called, *I Dolci*, which is Italian for ‘desserts.’ The school only gives the course four times a year...one week every quarter. Fortunately, the timing works out well for me. The desserts course will begin two days after I finish the two-week cooking course.”

“So, when will you be flying off to Tuscany?”

“Well, I haven’t bought the tickets, yet. I was waiting to discuss the flight arrangements with you.”

He nodded in agreement.

“I was thinking of departing for Florence on Tuesday, July 8th, actually arriving there on Wednesday, the 9th. I’ll rest at the school for a couple of days; do some sightseeing; get to know the staff; and meet the students who will be completing the course before mine...My first course, *The Art of Tuscan Cooking*, will begin on Monday, the 14th, and end on Saturday, the 26th. The desserts course will begin on the following Monday and end on Saturday, August 2nd. So, you should come to meet me on the 3rd, and then we can spend a week or so touring Tuscany.”

“Hmm, the 3rd of August? I’m not sure if I can break away for a week at that time. I really don’t know what will be on my plate around two months from now. Lately, there have been one or two urgent matters that I have had to deal with almost every day.”

“You really should find the time to come to Lucca, Paul. Delegate some of your work to your staff. You certainly could use some time away from the drawing board.”

“I’ll try. I really will. But for now, just buy *your* ticket, leaving your return date open-ended. I know it will cost more that way, but we can certainly afford it because I’m making tons of money. If I can meet you in Lucca, I’ll make last-minute arrangements...By the way, architects rarely use drawing boards anymore. We use the computer to draw. It’s called ‘CAD drafting’...Computer-Aided Drafting.”

After a dinner of cannelloni, followed by veal cutlet Milanese, and finishing-off a bottle of Chianti, Paul commented, “With cooking like this, do you *really* need to go to a cooking school in Tuscany?”

“Well, I certainly have a great deal of cooking experience, especially southern Italian cooking...growing up Sicilian-American...and I truly love to cook, but you know that my goal is to write an Italian cookbook and that the book should include some northern Italian recipes. In order for me to be a credible author of an Italian cookbook, I should be able to indicate that I’ve studied cooking in Italy. Otherwise, people who might consider buying my book might ask themselves, ‘Who is *she* to write an Italian cookbook?’”

“Yeah, just what the world needs...another Italian cookbook,” he laughed.

“But mine will be different. First of all, it will be well-written. I’ll use my twenty years of editing experience to create a wonderful cookbook. All I need is a clever title for the book...an eye-catcher...something like, *Yo, You Wanna Cook Italian?*”

“It’s a shame that you’ve been out of work for over a year.”

“Well, you know the publishing business isn’t what it used to be, what with all of the self-published books that have come on the market in recent years...Plus at age forty-three, I’ve priced myself out of the field because recent grads are happy to earn half my old salary.”

“So, maybe this cookbook idea of yours will lead to something big.”

“Yeah, perhaps, but at a minimum, it will keep me occupied, and more important, satisfy my need to be creative.” She laughed, “How many times can I rearrange the furniture or redecorate?”

“I totally understand.”

“You should. As an architect, your life revolves around creativity.”

“True.” He nodded several times and then drew close to her, looking deeply into her eyes. “Marissa, did you ever hear the expression, ‘What happens in Tuscany stays in Tuscany?’”

“No, but I’ve heard, ‘What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.’”

“True, you hear that expression a lot on TV.”

“What are you getting at, Paul?”

“Well, you’re still a very attractive woman...and you’ll be alone in Italy for nearly a month.”

“So?”

“I’m sure there will be quite a few Italian men flirting with you at the cooking school and in the town of Lucca...You know, I think that as a shapely redhead with a light complexion, many Italian men will be attracted to you especially because most Italian women are dark-skinned brunettes.”

“Oh, they can flirt all they want. You don’t have to worry, Paul.”

“Listen, we’ve been married for twenty-two years. Italy is a very romantic place. If someone makes your heart flutter a bit, just let things happen. Don’t let your being a married woman hold you back.”

“What? You’ve got to be kidding...You’ve got to be fuckin’ kidding...Right?”

“No, I’m serious.”

“You’re serious? So, let me get this straight...you’re basically giving me permission to cheat on you while I’m in Italy?”

“Well...No...Well, in a way, but don’t think of it as *cheating*.”

“Okay, then, what is it?”

“Think of it as me giving you your freedom to have a mid-life fling...freedom to renew your inner being...to put some spark back into your life.”

“Spark? I know that the spark in our marriage isn’t what it used to be, but I don’t see how your crazy idea of my having a fling will improve our marriage.”

“It’s not a crazy idea, Marissa.”

She remained transfixed as all kinds of thoughts raced through her head. Then she smiled, “Wait a minute...Wait a minute...Are you suggesting this because *you* want to cheat?”

“Oh no, not at all. I’m not looking to cheat on you.”

“Are you sure, Paul?”

“Sure, I’m sure. My having an affair would only lead to complications. Speaking hypothetically, of course, if I were to cheat on you, it is likely that the woman would be from Long Island or Manhattan. Even a one-night stand could lead to trouble because the woman might want more than a one-night stand. But if you should hook-up with someone in Tuscany, it would begin and end there...over 4,000 miles away from here. It wouldn’t hurt me because I wouldn’t really know about it, and even if you told me some of the details of what happened, I don’t think it would bother me...It might even excite me.”

“Excite you? Oh, enough of this ‘What happens in Tuscany stays in Tuscany’ stuff! I don’t know what’s gotten into you, Paul. I really don’t.”

## ***Chapter 24: Detective Montefusco***

**Detective Montefusco** was nursing his third cup of espresso as he leafed through *La Repubblica* – one of Italy’s major newspapers – in his top floor office in Lucca’s police headquarters. *La Questura di Lucca*, as it is referred to in Italian, is located at Via Cavour N. 120 in an architecturally-pleasing, three-story, 19th-Century building with a tan façade featuring 10-foot-high windows set within pale-peach-colored inlays on the upper two floors. The bars on the ground floor windows are consistent with the building’s function as a police headquarters, while the green wooden-slat shutters covering the windows of the upper two stories give the building the appearance of a stately hotel. The building’s lack of air conditioning would be obvious to an outside observer on this very hot summer day because the lower halves of all of the shutters were swung open on their horizontal hinges.

Montefusco’s office was in the center of the building facing Via Cavour. The black stenciled letters on the opaque glass of the dark brown wooden door read, “*Gianpietro Montefusco, Capo di Investigatori.*” In his public dealings and to his colleagues of lesser rank, he was usually referred to by the honorific, “*Dottore,*” but to his friends, he was affectionately called, “Gianni.”

His office, though quite spacious, seemed rather tight. It was crammed with books and cardboard boxes filled with case files stacked on shelves and also on the floor; three chairs for visitors; one beat-up maroon leather couch; a blackboard; and an espresso machine. The couch also served as a closet of sorts because various articles of his clothing were carelessly thrown in piles on two of its three seat cushions. The focal point within the room was the huge, ornately-carved mahogany desk with a Tiffany lamp and a black telephone upon it. The many loose papers and file folders atop the desk left the detective very little room to operate; but, somehow, he did – and he did so extremely effectively. He was an “old school” detective. No computer could be found anywhere in his office. His disdain for computers was legendary, causing his younger colleagues to wonder if time had passed him by.

The fifty-seven-year-old detective had been on the force for thirty-five years. He was eligible for retirement, but the word “retirement” was not in his vocabulary – at least when it came to himself. Detective work was in his blood, and not doing investigative work would cut-off his blood supply; that was his mindset. He believed that the day would come when he would be offered the position of *il Commissario di Polizia*. If he were to be offered the job of Police Commissioner, he wasn’t sure

if he would accept it because it was mostly an administrative position; too far away from the action for his liking.

In his youth, his soccer skills were so exceptional that he had been scouted by the A.C. Milan Football Club. But a severe leg injury resulting from a motorbike crash had put an end to his soccer dreams, and eventually, after trying his hand at several menial jobs, he decided that he might be suited for career in law enforcement. His years on the force had transformed his once sculpted body into that of a somewhat pudgy, but muscular, middle-aged man. His once curly black hair was now a salt-and-pepper gray – but, at least, he still had most of it. His rise through the ranks had been less than meteoric, but eventually, his exceptional investigatory skills, coupled with his seniority on the force, led to his promotion to *Capo* of detectives – his position for the past seven years.

“*Dottore*, shouldn’t we be leaving now for the cooking school? Two patrol cars have been at the murder scene for two hours, already,” asked Enzo Oliveri, his young driver and assistant.

Staring up at the twelve-foot-high ceiling, he pointed to the far left corner and said, “That peeling plaster tells me that the roof must be leaking in that spot.”

“*Si*, *Dottore*, I will report the problem to the custodian...But, what about the murder investigation?”

“Oh, we will leave in about ten minutes. After all, the body isn’t going anywhere, is it?”

Fifteen minutes later, Detective Montefusco stepped into the back of an unmarked dark blue Fiat, seating himself on the right side of the vehicle. Oliveri smoothly shifted the car into gear and they were on their way to the scene of the murder.

“Shall I drive there *con veloce*?”

“No, there is no need to speed. It has been my experience that arriving at a crime scene late can be beneficial.”

“Beneficial? How is that, *Dottore*?”

“Well, should the perpetrator of the crime...in this case the murderer...be at the scene of the crime, the waiting can make him or her become a bit nervous as they rehash and rehash what story they are going to tell the police. If that is the case, I

might be able to see something in the eyes; or detect something in the voice, or the posture...and of course, I always look for excessive perspiration.”

“I have noticed that you always make the people you are interrogating answer the same question two or three times.”

“*Si`*, that is so I can find any inconsistencies in their responses.”

“Well, your method has worked very well for you. It has made you one of the most respected detectives in Tuscany...well actually, in all of Italy.”

“Your words are very kind and flattering, Enzo, but my goal is, and always has been, just to do the best job I can...not to seek fame.”

“I guess fame found you when *La Corriere della Sera* wrote that full-page story about you two years ago.”

“*Si`*, *Si`*, fame found me, but people quickly forget.”