

*Wife abandons husband and four children, profoundly affecting future generation. The oldest daughter feels guilty, yet repeats her mother's action to the detriment of her daughter.*

## **Sicilian Secrets: An Odyssey for Truth**

By Alberta B. Hornyak

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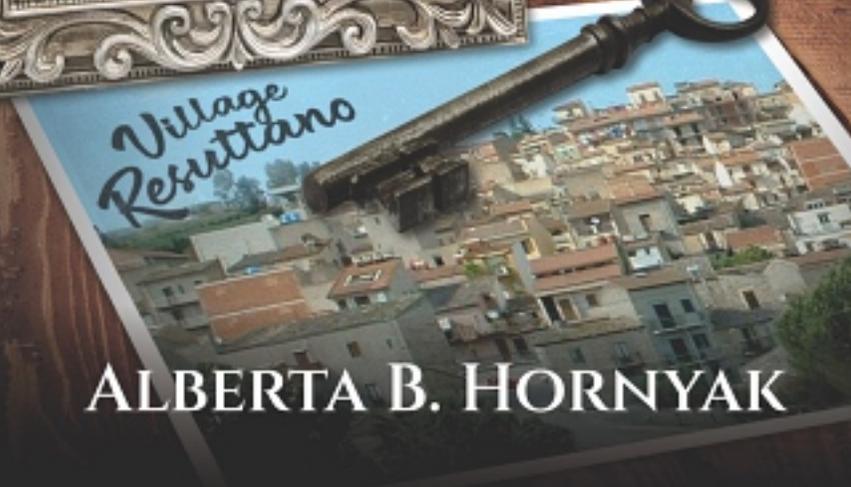
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# SICILIAN SECRETS

An Odyssey  
for Truth



*Village  
Resuttano*



ALBERTA B. HORNYAK

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*Every secret has an encore.*  
*Truth, like heavy cream, rises to the top.*

Anonymous



*The La Placas (back row, l-r): Pauline, Thomas, Mazie, Ida; (front row, l-r): Grace, father Pietro, mother Giuseppina, and Elizabeth*



*Mazie with (l-r): Bettina, Silvio, and Serafina*

*Papa Joe*



*Northend Tavern, circa 1940*



## FLIGHT

On Monday, October 23, 1933, the twisted family legend is set in motion in Mazie Torantino's kitchen. Her husband, Joseph, is off to yet another town meeting at the firehouse, trying to grasp the insanity of a nation grappling with deepening financial hardships. Her brother-in-law Paul is making his weekly visit, but he is in the living room listening to the radio.

"I think you love Uncle Paul more than Papa," teenage Serafina begins.

"Nonsense, we just have fun together and he helps with the shopping," her mother says offhandedly, throwing the homemade pasta into a boiling pot, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Oh, was it 'fun' when I saw you kissing a few moments ago? Is it 'fun' when his arms are hugging you forever and your head is on his shoulder?"

"You need to watch your tongue, young lady," Mazie hisses.

Serafina's younger sister Bettina joins them in the kitchen.

"You need to watch what you are doing!" Serafina picks up in a louder voice. "When Papa finds out, he'll kill you both. What shame on our family!"

Paul, hearing the commotion, steps into the kitchen. “What’s going on here? You speak to your mother with respect.”

“Respect! What do you know about respect?” Serafina turns on him. “There’s going to be murder in Eastville when Papa finds out—and I have half a mind to tell him.”

Bettina sobs, “Don’t tell, Serafina.”

Serafina’s threat is not an overstatement; Sicilian men of this time have pride. Were Joseph to discover his wife and brother were lovers, he would be insanely angry.

An uneasy silence ensues. Serafina and Bettina retreat to their bedroom. Mazie drains the pasta, puts it into the fridge. She and Paul exchange gestures in silence with intense looks. They glance at Gregorio wide-eyed, standing in his crib. Silvio has been concentrating on running his toy train engine into towers of dominoes.

Silently, Paul goes out to his car. Mazie calls to the girls, “Uncle Paul and I are going to take a short drive to discuss all this. Please watch the boys.”

“Think hard,” Serafina yells back.

Mazie heads quickly to her room, grabs her coat and purse. She slips a framed photo of Serafina dressed as a Bo-Peep girl for a wedding into her bag. She twists off her engagement and wedding bands and a gold, diamond-studded bracelet engraved “1915,” a wedding gift from Joseph. As Mazie walks to the front door, Silvio looks up. “It’s getting late, Silvio. Better get ready for bed.”

“Mama, where are you going?”

“No place special. Just out to talk with Uncle Paul privately.”

“Bring me a lollipop, Mama?” asks Gregorio.

“Sure, Baby,” Mazie says in a soft voice. She touches each child on the head and walks out the door.

Paul backs out so crazily that cinders splay from spinning wheels, excoriating the driveway. They have little time to make an escape before Joseph arrives home. They are two fugitives fleeing a scene in desperation.

It becomes late and Serafina and Bettina send Silvio to brush his teeth and tuck baby brother Gregorio in bed. He protests, saying Mama is going to give him a lollipop soon.

When Joseph finally returns, he doesn't become immediately alarmed. He thinks the two may have gone for a drive, yet he waits up, pacing the floor until dawn.

Meanwhile, Mazie is sobbing as her brother-in-law and lover, Paul, speeds out of Eastville, New Jersey, toward the New York state line. Fear fills the car. Given the circumstances, the car is too sporty and flashy, too visible.

Mazie says, haltingly, “Where will we go? Joe will call the police. I'm so scared.”

“Mazie, you know I love you. We have wanted to be together for a long time. I have given some thought to where we might live. But first we need to borrow a little money from my boss in Ossining. He'll give

me a personal loan, no questions asked. I know he will. Then we will head to Albany.”

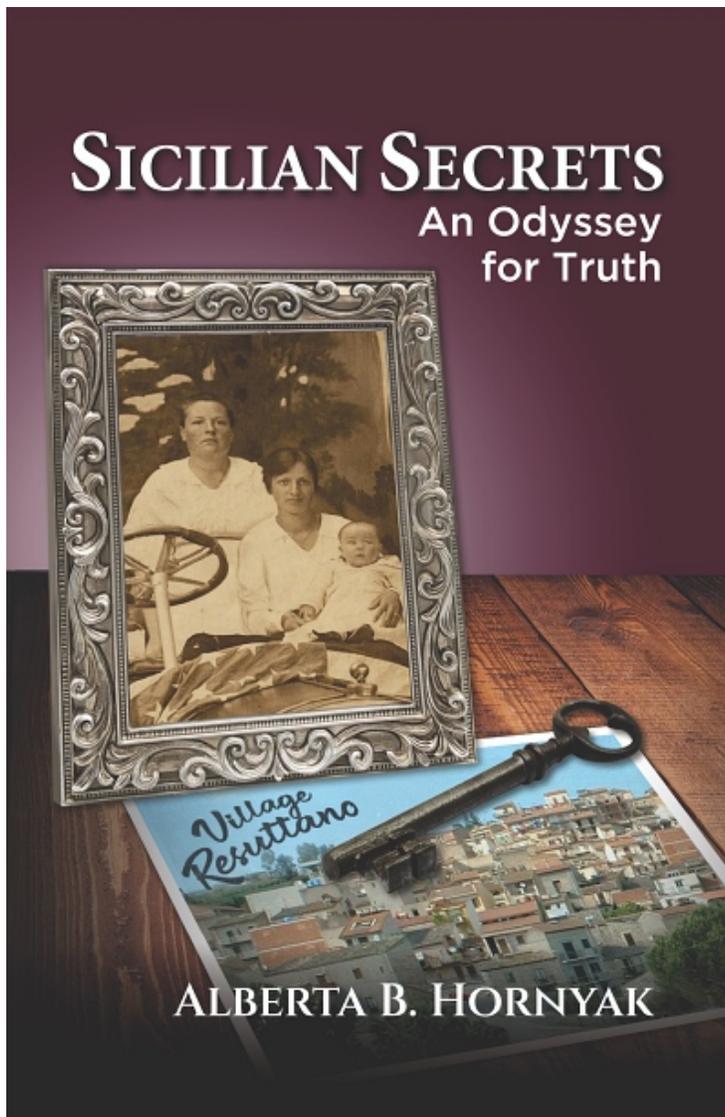
“You have thought about running away? But this is so sudden. Serafina is really riled up. She’ll spill everything she has seen.”

“Don’t imagine things that might not happen. I can find work as a barber anywhere,” Paul assures her. “Try to sleep. The 130-mile drive will take over four hours—I don’t want to speed and get stopped. Don’t worry. Albany’s a big city. We can get lost there.”

“It’s so far away. I don’t know anyone there. All my family are in Eastville.”

“We are in love, right? We will start over and make new friends.”

And on they drive through the early evening into the dark night toward an uncertain future.



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