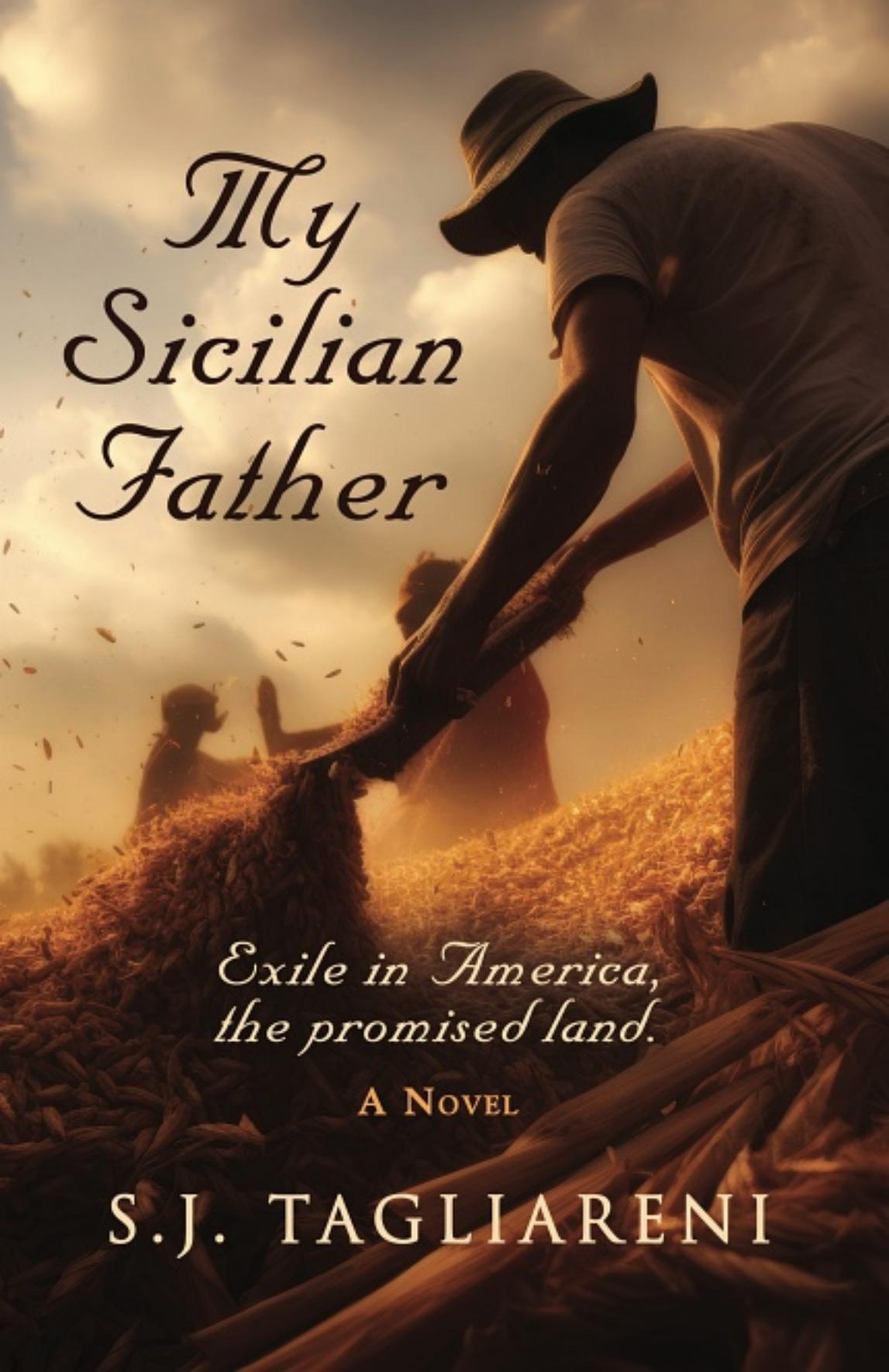


My Sicilian Father traces the journey of an immigrant family as they navigate 20th-century America. The story unfolds through the eyes of a patriarch whose legacy is forged in resilience, sacrifice, and love.

My Sicilian Father: Exile in America, the Promised Land

By S.J. Tagliareni

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A dramatic, sepia-toned photograph of a man and a woman in a wheat field. The man, wearing a straw hat and a light-colored shirt, is leaning over, harvesting wheat with a scythe. A woman in a red dress stands behind him, watching. The scene is set at sunset or sunrise, with a bright, hazy sky and falling wheat stalks in the foreground.

My Sicilian Father

*Exile in America,
the promised land.*

A NOVEL

S.J. TAGLIARENI

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Reviews

“My Sicilian Father, a gripping historical novel set in 1912, tells the unforgettable story of a Sicilian family’s journey to America in search of hope, opportunity, and a sense of belonging. With themes of perseverance, cultural identity, and generational strength, the novel resonates deeply with today’s conversations around immigration and the evolving American dream.”

Michael Bufano

“Set against the turbulent backdrop of Sicily, immigration, and World War II, this is a story of exile, survival, and the indomitable power of love. Tagliareni weaves fact and fiction into a seamless narrative, giving voice to lives shaped by history’s harshest trials. His characters emerge as both victims of circumstance and shapers of their own destiny, leaving a lasting mark on every page. This is historical fiction that is deeply moving, deeply human, and deeply true.”

David Stern

“*My Sicilian Father* is an unforgettable journey of courage, sacrifice, and hope. Spanning continents and generations, this sweeping historical novel follows the Tagliareni family from sun-drenched Sicilian hills to the gritty streets of early twentieth-century America. Faced with betrayal, exile, and the hardships of immigration, they endure with unbreakable resolve, bound

Salvatore Tagliareni

together by love and heritage. Richly detailed and deeply human, this is a much-needed antidote to today's pessimism and hostility, and a powerful tribute to family, faith, and the pursuit of the American dream.”

Joseph Pittelli, MD.

“This novel broke my heart and healed it in equal measure. My Sicilian Father is more than a historical journey—it’s a love letter to family, faith, and the sacrifices that shape us. The Tagliareni family’s story is one I’ll carry with me for a long time.”

Karen Yula

“Rarely is there a novel with such empathy that the reader feels the heartbeat of the characters. In this case, the Tagliareni family is vividly portrayed as they leave their beloved Sicily, under duress, for America. The struggles of immigrant families relocating to a new world--especially through the Great Depression--are epic. Here is an opportunity to experience it through the lens of this heroic immigrant family.”

Patricia Gussin, *New York Times* best-selling author

“*My Sicilian Father* is an unforgettable journey of courage, sacrifice, and hope. Spanning continents and generations, this historical novel follows the Tagliareni family from sun-drenched Sicilian hills to the gritty streets of early twentieth-century

My Sicilian Father

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E. Michael Boutin

“Life, loss, wisdom, the strength of character, and the maintenance of human dignity are the cornerstones of Salvatore Tagliareni’s latest moving novel. While his prior novels focus mainly on the Jewish faith as it pertains to the horrors related to the Holocaust, this work revolves around the faith and caring relationship of one Italian family. Tagliareni’s embodiment of human impact for understanding and telling a story of the adversity of one family is riveting and a gift for the reader.”

Lois SchaeXer, author

“This novel is a masterclass in storytelling. Through vivid scenes and unforgettable characters, *My Sicilian Father* explores the tension between tradition and change, and the quiet heroism of everyday life.”

Carl Gargiulo

Salvatore Tagliareni

“With warmth and wisdom, *My Sicilian Father* paints a compelling picture of one family’s journey through hardship and hope. It’s a celebration of roots, identity, and the enduring power of love.”

Helen Davies

“Tagliareni masterfully conjures the sights, sounds, and soul of early-century America, immersing readers in the heart of Jersey City’s Little Italy. With vivid prose and emotional depth, he invites you to walk shoulder-to-shoulder with the family, feeling every triumph and heartbreak as they navigate the challenges of a new world. It’s not just a story—it’s a time machine, transporting you into the immigrant experience with raw authenticity and lyrical grace.”

Robert Gussin, publisher and author

“*My Sicilian Father* unfolds as a luminous tapestry of courage, sacrifice, and enduring hope. From the golden hills of Sicily to the unforgiving streets of early twentieth-century America, the Tagliareni family’s saga is a masterclass in resilience. Through betrayal and exile, their unwavering bond—rooted in love and tradition—shines. This richly woven narrative opens a poignant counterpoint to modern cynicism, celebrating the timeless pursuit of faith, family, and the American dream.”

Gustav Berger, author

My Sicilian Father

“From the cobblestone memories of Sicily to the bustling streets of New Jersey, *My Sicilian Father* is a lyrical and deeply personal tale that resonates with anyone who’s ever wrestled with belonging.”

Frances Martino

Chapter 1: **Blood in the Mist**

Killing was his favorite pastime.

In the narrow, winding streets of Cammarata, Nicolo Verlingo moved like a shadow, cautious yet bold. A vicious killer with a history of brutal crimes, he navigated the village's dark alleys in a tailored suit, the fabric still with dried blood. The flickering gas lamps cast uneven light, leaving much of the town cloaked in gloom. Not a soul stirred.

He slipped through the alleys like a mountain lion stalking prey, his blood-stained leather shoes whispering against the cobblestones. His scarred face bore the legacy of violence, a chiseled jaw, gray stubble, and eyes that missed nothing. Every step was measured, each movement calculated. Once an underboss in the Sicilian underworld, Verlingo was also a master artist of death. Two days ago, he escaped from a maximum-security prison. In his flight, he slit the throats of Father Anthony Padovano, a chaplain who had come to hear his confession, and Vittorio Rufino, a young policeman and father of three. The killings were swift—surgical. Now, on the outskirts, Verlingo chose a direction and climbed a hill. From the summit, he spotted a dairy farm in the distance. Beneath the brim of his fedora, his sharp eyes scanned for danger. The farm looked promising—isolated, quiet. He approached with caution and slipped behind the nearest barn.

Dawn crept over the hills as Rosario Tagliareni stepped out of the farmhouse and headed toward the barns. The sky shifted from

black to soft pastels—blue, pink, and gold. A cool breeze carried the scent of fresh hay. The farm, nestled in the rural Sicilian landscape, lay beneath a veil of mountain mist. Shadows from the barns and silos stretched and shortened as sunlight pierced the clouds. The dairy cows stirred, their breath visible in the crisp air, tails swishing in greeting.

Rosario filled wooden buckets with milk as the farm awakened around him. Ravens called out in jubilant bursts, olive leaves rustled, and the rhythmic sounds of milking joined the morning's symphony. This land was his sanctuary—a place of peace, purpose, and gratitude.

He didn't hear the barn door open.

A figure stepped from the shadows and blocked his path. Rosario froze, heart pounding, as he stared down the barrel of a gun.

“Who are you? What do you want?” he asked.

“It doesn't matter who I am. Are you alone?”

“Yes.”

“Who's in the house?”

“My wife and children.”

“Any men?”

“Two of my sons.”

“Any guns?”

“Two shotguns in the shed. I use them to keep wolves away from the chicken coop.”

“Good. Lead me to your house.”

“Please...don’t hurt my family.”

“Shut up. Do what you’re told, and no one gets hurt.”

Rosario considered attacking him. The man was pale, bleeding heavily. Rosario’s strength, built from years of labor, could overpower him. But what if he failed? Would this man kill his family? He couldn’t take that risk.

They entered the house. The only sounds came from the kitchen. Verlingo shoved Rosario forward, peeking around the corner. A woman in a long blue skirt bent over the wood stove.

Rosario’s wife turned and gasped.

“Don’t be afraid, Concetta,” Rosario said. “He won’t hurt us if we do what he wants.”

“Where’s the rest of your family?” Verlingo asked.

“Sleeping upstairs,” Concetta replied.

“Go get them. But if you try anything, I’ll kill your husband.”

“Wait,” Rosario said. “Before she goes, let me help you. You’re bleeding badly. You’ll pass out.”

“Damn fool guard tried to be a hero and shot me. Don’t be like him, or you’ll end up the same.”

“Let me help. Concetta, get some sheets and olive oil.”

Verlingo swayed, nearly fainting. He nodded reluctantly. “While you clean the wound, I’ll keep the gun on you.”

Rosario worked quickly, his big hands deftly cleaned the wound. He thought about the dead guard and was not as gentle as he could have been.

Within minutes, the entire family entered the kitchen.

Verlingo, in a loud voice, said, “All of you get on the floor near that wall. You, the tall one, what’s your name?”

“Onofrio.” He was a gangly young man, eyes downcast, fists opening and closing.

“Go to the shed and bring back the shotguns and the cartridges, but remember I have eight bullets in my gun and will use them if you try anything.”

Onofrio left the kitchen and returned with the guns and cartridges.

“Unload them and place them on the table.”

The youngest, Salvatore, clung to his mother’s apron, sobbing uncontrollably. His small body trembled, his cries piercing the thick silence of the kitchen. Concetta murmured, hoping his cries would not anger the gunman. She felt his hard head trying to burrow into her body.

Verlingo pocketed the cartridges and slung the shotguns over his shoulder. His eyes found Concetta’s. “I want the crying one and the next in age. You—Rosario—bring them to the barn. The rest of you stay here. If anyone leaves or breathes a word of this, I’ll kill your husband and the boys.”

Rosario knelt to pry Salvatore from Concetta's grasp. The boy wailed, his arms locked around her waist. Vito, barely older, crouched beside him and whispered gently.

"It's okay, Salvatore. Don't be scared," he said, his voice steady, protective. He reached for his brother's hand, gripping it with quiet strength. "I'm right here."

Salvatore looked up, tear-streaked and trembling, but Vito's calm presence softened the panic. Together, they followed Rosario toward the barn, Verlingo trailing behind like a storm cloud.

Inside the loft, the hay muffled their steps. The air was thick, the space too small—too close. Verlingo's boots thudded ominously behind them. Rosario kept his eyes on his sons, his body tense, his mind calculating.

"Bring me rope," Verlingo said.

Rosario descended the ladder and returned with two lengths of coarse rope. He climbed back up, heart pounding.

"Tie them to the pole. Wrists and feet."

Rosario hesitated. His hands trembled as he bound his sons, the rope biting into their small limbs. He couldn't believe the cruelty. Verlingo watched, unmoved.

There would be a moment—there was always a moment—when the killer's guard would drop. And when it did, Rosario would strike. He caught Vito's eye and gave a subtle nod. The boy understood. When the time came, they would move.

Rosario's muscles coiled like springs. The afternoon sun filtered through the barn's slats, casting long shadows across his sons' faces—faces too young to know this kind of fear. Vito and Salvatore huddled together, bound and silent.

“They’re innocent children, Rosario said, voice low but firm. “This is between you and me.”

Verlingo laughed, the sound sharp and cruel. He lit a cigarette, the ember flaring like a demon’s eye. “Innocent?” he sneered. “Who cares? They mean nothing to me. Killing them would be easier than crushing this cigarette.”

Something inside Rosario snapped. He had tried reason, negotiation, and even mercy. But this was unforgivable. *I will see this man dead*, he thought.

The hours dragged, raw as open wounds. Shadows lengthened across the hay-strewn floor.

Rosario watched the sun descend. Then—movement.

Through the slats, Verlingo spotted four policemen climbing the hill toward the farm. His eyes narrowed. He grabbed Rosario by the shirt, yanking him close.

“If you say one word,” Nicolo hissed, crouched near the loft’s open window as the distant murmur of voices grew louder, “your boys won’t see another sunrise.”

Rosario didn’t flinch. His eyes stayed fixed on his sons—Salvatore trembling, Vito silent. He nodded slowly. Not in surrender, but in calculation. Gravel crunched beneath approaching boots. Then, a familiar voice rang out below.

“Rosario!”

It was Chief Tomasso Sorrento. Friend. Godfather to Rosario’s daughter. And now, their only hope.

Rosario descended the ladder and stepped out in front of the barn doors, waving casually.

“Good morning,” he called, injecting forced cheer into his voice. “Surprised you made it up the hill in your condition.”

Tomasso chuckled. “If I recall, you’re older than me.”

“Yes, but in far better shape.” Rosario smiled. “Giovanni, it’s good to see you, my friend.”

Tomasso blinked—just for a moment—but Rosario caught the flicker in his eyes. He’d called him Giovanni, not Tomasso. A deliberate mistake. A signal. Rosario raised his eyebrows, locking eyes with the chief. Something’s not right.

Tomasso played along, his tone light. “Just came for the eggs your wife promised me. Also...we’re looking into the whereabouts of a fugitive, Nicolo Verlingo. Seen any strangers lately?”

“All I ever see are my cows and chickens.” Rosario smiled again, eyebrows raised.

Tomasso blinked once, then nodded, tension creasing his brow. That was all he needed—Verlingo was here.

Their conversation drifted to farming, weather, and the price of cheese. But beneath the surface, the air snapped with subtext. When they parted, Tomasso gave no sign he’d grasped anything. Yet once outside, his stride changed—deliberate. Urgent.

That Evening

As dusk fell, Verlingo ordered Rosario to fetch food and wine from the main house.

“The boys are still shaken,” Rosario said gently. “At least let me untie their hands.”

Verlingo hesitated, then nodded. “Fine. But remember—I have your sons.”

Rosario climbed down. Concetta was already at the door, having seen him leave the barn.

“Are the boys alright?” she whispered, her face strained with worry.

Rosario embraced her. “They’re alive. But Salvatore hasn’t stopped crying. I’m here for food—and maybe blankets. It’ll be cold tonight.”

Concetta hurried to the root cellar. As she gathered supplies, Rosario leaned in.

“Tomasso knows Verlingo is here. I think they’ll come after dark.”

Concetta trembled. “I just hope they don’t do anything that puts the boys in danger.”

“I’m sure that’s foremost in his mind.”

Rosario returned to the loft with food. Verlingo made him eat first, testing for poison. Vito ate quickly, but Salvatore sat frozen, overwhelmed. Rosario spoke softly, coaxing him. After a few minutes, Salvatore took a few bites of ham and sipped milk.

•• The Approach

Dressed in black, the police climbed the hill under the cover of night, circling to the rear of the house. They believed Verlingo was in the loft, probably holding one or more of the children. A back entry would keep them hidden.

Concetta saw them first. Relief and dread warred in her chest. “He has Vito,” she said, “and Salvatore.” Her hands were outstretched.

Tomasso reassured her. “Their safety is our priority.”

Rosario, back in the house for blankets and cigars, saw Tomasso and nodded.

“You understood why I called you Giovanni.”

“I did. We’re ready to end this.”

“He has my sons tied up in the loft.”

Tomasso pulled out a paper. “Show me the layout. Where are they?”

Rosario pointed, then blurted, “If you storm the barn, he’ll kill them.”

Tomasso nodded. “We’ll be careful. Is there a rear entrance?”

“Yes.”

“Locked?”

Rosario almost laughed. “No farmer locks a barn. The cows don’t steal.”

“Good. We’ll enter quietly. When we’re in position, we’ll ring a cowbell.”

“Why?”

“To draw him down. If he comes, we grab him.”

“He’s armed. Shotgun and pistol.”

“We know.”

“I’d better get back.”

The Confrontation

Back in the loft, Rosario tasted the wine to prove it was safe. They ate. Verlingo relaxed slightly, puffing on a cigar Rosario had brought. But then, he insisted that the boys be tied hand and foot again.

Suddenly, the soft clang of a cowbell echoed.

“What’s that?” Verlingo snapped.

“The cows. They haven’t been milked.”

The sound came again. Verlingo’s eyes narrowed. He ordered Rosario to the far side of the loft and moved to peer down into the barn.

Rosario’s heart pounded. This was it.

As Verlingo leaned forward, Rosario charged, slamming into him. The shotgun fired as Verlingo tumbled down the ladder.

The police opened fire. Seven shots. Verlingo died instantly.

My Sicilian Father

Rosario rushed to his sons, untying them, pulling them into his arms.

“It’s over,” he whispered. “It’s over, Salvatore. It’s over, Vito.”

This part of the story had ended, but the saga of legacy, survival, and betrayal was far from finished.

Chapter 2:

A Chance for Revenge

Giuseppe Lupo sat at his kitchen table, the morning sun slanting across the Palermo Sentinel. His calloused fingers traced the bold headline: “Local Hero Ends Hostage Standoff—Criminal Shot Dead in Loft.”

The front-page photo showed Rosario Tagliareni, flanked by his sons, their faces pale but resolute. The article praised his bravery, his quick thinking, and his role in ending the siege.

The villagers called him a saint.

Lupo sneered.

Rosario Tagliareni—benevolent, generous, beloved by the poor of Cammarata. A man who gave milk to widows and bread to beggars. Lupo loathed him. He despised the way Rosario’s kindness elevated him, made others forget their debts and their place.

But now, reading the article, Lupo saw something else: opportunity.

He studied every detail, memorizing the timeline. One date stood out—the incarceration of the criminal, Verlingo. Lupo’s mind began to churn.

What if the story was false? What if Verlingo hadn’t just arrived—what if he’d been a frequent visitor to the Tagliareni farm? What if Rosario had harbored him?

Lupo knew the local police chief would dismiss him. But the governor? The governor was desperate. The city was restless. The press was circling. And the word “Mafia” still had the power to unlock doors.

Palermo: The Governor’s Office

Without an appointment, Lupo arrived at the Ufficio Governo Siciliano, demanding to speak with the governor.

“Do you have an appointment?” the officer asked, eyeing him warily.

“No,” Lupo replied, “but I have vital information about the Mafia. The governor needs to hear.”

The word struck a nerve. The officer hesitated, then disappeared through the double doors.

Minutes later, a man approached—tall, composed, with silver at his temples.

“Good morning,” he said. “I’m Paolo Corso, the governor’s chief of staff. What do you know about the Mafia?”

Lupo leaned in. “I have eyewitness testimony. Rosario Tagliareni—he’s not a hero. He’s an accomplice. Verlingo was a regular visitor to his farm.”

Corso’s expression didn’t change. “Come with me.”

Inside his office, Corso asked for details. Lupo recited his story with precision.

“I saw Verlingo on September 25th. He was with Tagliareni, right in front of the farm.”

Corso raised an eyebrow. “That’s a very specific date.”

“It’s my daughter’s birthday. We were headed to the village when I saw them.”

Corso left briefly and returned with Verlingo’s prison file. He flipped through the pages, then looked up.

“Verlingo wasn’t incarcerated until October. Your date is a month before his arrest.”

Lupo nodded. “Exactly. He was free then. And he was with Tagliareni.”

“Would you testify in court?”

“I believe I must.”

Corso smiled. “Then let’s make history.”

History: The Mafia

Long before Rosario’s trial, before the Mafia became synonymous with fear, Sicily was a land of fragmented loyalties. In the 19th century, as foreign powers came and went, the island’s peasants found themselves abandoned by the state and preyed upon by landlords. In this vacuum of justice, local groups emerged—self-styled protectors who offered security in exchange for obedience. They were not yet the Mafia, but the seed had been planted.

These early “men of honor” operated under a code: omertà, the vow of silence. They settled disputes, punished betrayal, and

demanded tribute. To many, they were saviors. But power, once tasted, rarely remains benevolent.

The Rise of the Beast

By the early 20th century, the Mafia had evolved into a sprawling network of families, each controlling slices of Sicily like feudal lords. They infiltrated politics, manipulated elections, and turned public contracts into private fortunes. The state, either complicit or impotent, watched as the Mafia became a parallel government—one that ruled not by law, but by fear.

A Scourge Unleashed

By the time Rosario was born, the Mafia was no longer a whisper in the vineyards, it was a roar in the streets. Bombings, assassinations, and extortion became daily realities. Judges who dared to prosecute were murdered. Journalists who exposed the truth vanished. The government, riddled with corruption, oscillated between denial and desperation.

Rosario's prosecution was part of this desperation—a high-profile arrest, a public trial, a sentence meant to reassure the masses. But beneath the surface, the real criminals dined in luxury, their names unspoken, their crimes unpunished.

¶¶ The Governor's Decision

Corso knocked on the governor's door. "Your Excellency," he said, "I have news that may ease the pressure surrounding the Verlingo case."

Governor Sebastiano rose from his desk, weary but alert. “Tell me. The church is breathing down our necks. The families want justice.”

Corso relayed Lupo’s story. The governor listened, then smiled coldly.

“Finally,” he said, “a chance to show leadership—arrest Tagliareni. Find me a prosecutor and a judge. Bring the dairy farmer to Palermo. Feed the newspapers. Let them build the case.”

That Evening: A Dark Bargain

The governor’s office was dim, the lamplight casting long shadows across the walls.

Outside, Palermo glittered, oblivious.

“Maria,” he said to his secretary, loosening his tie, “what I’m about to tell you stays in this room.”

She nodded.

“Tagliareni is innocent. I know it.”

Maria’s eyes widened. “Then why—?”

“Because the city is screaming for blood. The press is relentless. The opposition is circling. We need a villain. And Tagliareni fits.” He poured himself a drink, the amber liquid catching the light. “He’s a nobody, Maria. No connections. No power. Just a man who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Maria hesitated. “But he saved his children.”

The governor's laugh was hollow. "And that makes him perfect? The public will have their monster. The press will have their story. And I," he took a long sip, "will finally sleep."

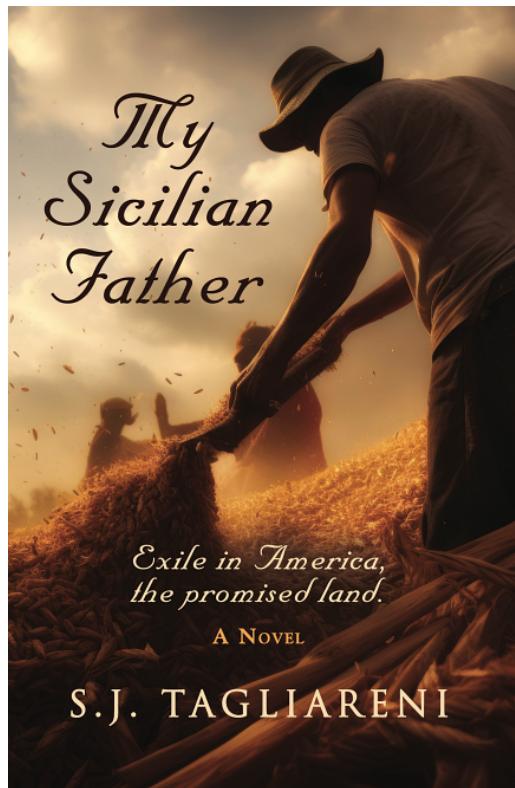
He walked to the window, his silhouette stark against the city lights. He knew his secretary would keep his confidence. He also knew she would prefer it if he didn't tell her these things, but she was his wife's niece, he'd given her the job, and part of the job was to share the dirty parts that made him feel like less of a man.

"Governance requires sacrifices," he said. "Better one man's freedom than the chaos of a city in panic."

He turned to her, voice sharp.

"Make sure the press release goes out first thing tomorrow. Paint him as the villain. Make it convincing."

Outside, the city sparkled. Inside, a man's fate was sealed.



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