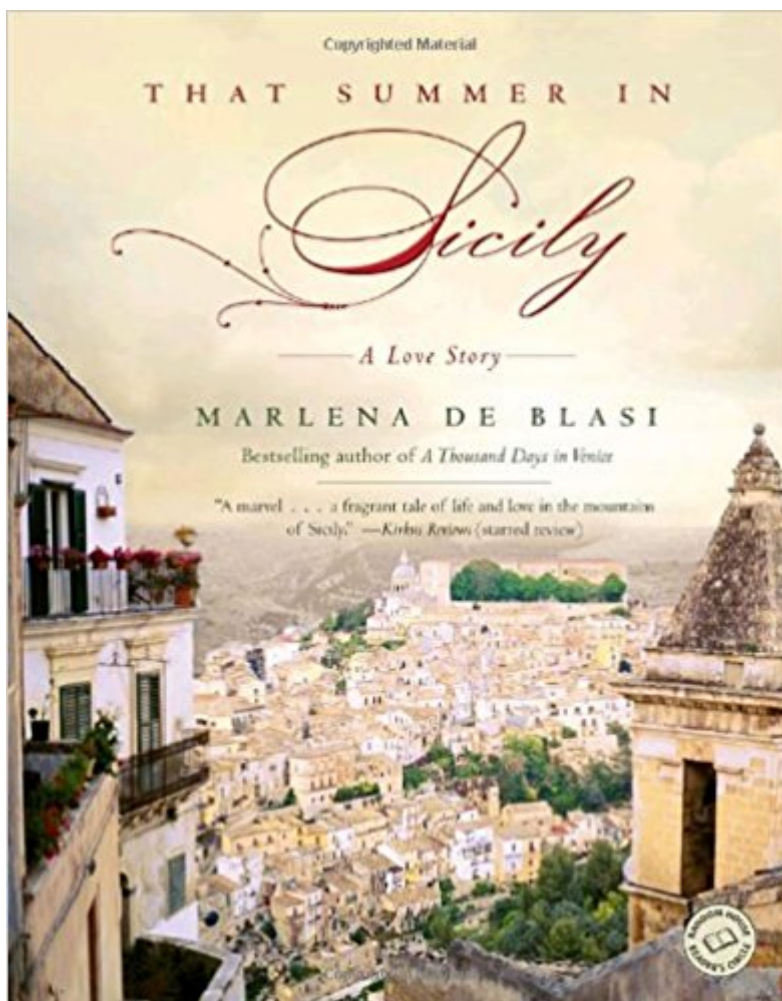


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# That Summer In Sicily: A Love Story



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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 --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This novel is a memoir, but it reads like a novel. The subtitle should cue you in: *A Love Story*. One as sentimental, dreamy, titillating, provocative, frustrating, and satisfying as any romance novel. Between a peasant girl and a prince, no less; both of them heroic. The necessary obstacles are

there, too. And, yes, the love story, served within the context of the author's visit to Sicily for a magazine article, does have a happy ending. How sweet is that! Still, this is more than a story of a true love with a happy ever after. Many times, Tosca, the storyteller, explains or justifies her actions or those of her people by invoking their identity as Sicilians. The love story, within the travel memoir is, thus, an interesting way of illustrating what it's like to be a Sicilian. It matters little that the picture Tosca paints does not go much deeper than our stereotypes of Sicilians (at least, as formed by movies). Tosca's story is a rather more entertaining way of telling us about the essence of Sicily than just describing sights, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, which De Blasi, in fact, does sumptuously in earlier chapters.

My grandmother came to America as a little girl from a small village in the Madonie Mountains much like this one. When I discovered and then visited it, my reception was warm and immediate, but then I am familia, in fact the capo of what remains of the distant cousins in America. Bless De Blasi for writing this beautiful, evocative story and description. Thanks to her, I understand better several of my Sicilian mannerisms buried oh so deep. The use of silence or dialect among outsiders is an example. Sicilian dialect, by the way, is not singular. It varies even from neighboring village to village. A villager can even identify the accent of speakers from different parishes within a village. How better to protect oneself from the outsider tax collector or Mafiosi? For the general reader, this is a great read.

Parts of this book were a little slow but the ending more than made up for it. Marlena de Blasi has a way of describing things that makes you feel you are sitting in the middle of the story listening to her tell it and I like that. I felt like at times I could smell the baking bread, see the feasts that were set out, feel Tosca's pain and happiness. I did not expect the ending and was overjoyed when I read it, not that I will divulge the secret, you will have to read it and no, don't start at the back of the book!!!! Overall, a really good book that I very much enjoyed.

I listened to the audio book presentation of this book first, and I loved it so much that I had to buy the book for my library, where I work. (We already owned the audio). The story starts off as a mere misbegotten travel story as Marlena de Blasi and her husband wander around Sicily trying to get people to talk to them. It isn't until she is directed to possible lodgings at a villa owned by a woman named Tosca that she falls under the spell of Sicily as she and her husband linger on at the villa. She finally is trusted by Tosca who slowly and most beautifully recounts her very amazing life and

love story. This story is all the more entrancing because it is a true story, and an incredible story of pain, and learning and love. The audio was one of the best I have ever listened to. This is really a book worth reading. It is magical.

This book completely transported me to Sicily. I didn't want to end and I lent it out to my friends right away. My only regret is that I didn't plan on reading it with them because it evoked so many emotions that I wanted to discuss with someone, but couldn't. Being a Sicilian American, so many things became clear to me as I read this. So many things I thought were just unique to my own family after reading this I have come to understand that they were uniquely Sicilian!

When Marlena de Blasi was given the assignment of writing about the interior regions of Sicily, she suspected that she got the job because others had turned it down. For "the center of the island is an aloof and pathless place, and the colossal silence of it all is reflected in its people," a friend warned. But de Blasi was intrigued. She made plans. She traveled to Sicily. She made phone calls. Her phone calls were not answered. Her meetings didn't happen. And when she tried to befriend people in the tourist industry, her elegant business cards elicited nothing more than grunts. De Blasi calls her editor to tell him this, and then turns to her husband to ask him what he'd like to do with the unexpected free time. They go to a bar, and see some policeman who frequents the place. De Blasi approaches them. Could they tell her of some place to stay in the countryside, perhaps a small hotel or pensione? Unexpectedly, they tell her. The woman's name is Tosca. The place is Villa Donnafugata. De Blasi and her husband thank them, and leave. What happens next is...so Sicilian. How would you feel if you think you're going to a hotel, only to arrive somewhere that could better be described as a nunnery? There are bells. There is a community of women, cooking, sewing, and digging. There is bustle and laughter. There is tragedy and death. Marlena de Blasi can only gape. But the biggest surprise comes from Tosca herself, who talks. And she is not talking about the weather, but spilling a tale of love, rivalry, jealousy and the mafia. All those things it is better to be silent about. Hence THAT SUMMER IN SICILY. Five stars.

Disclaimer, I didn't read the entire book because I couldn't get past the beginning, which was slow and not engaging for me. If you can make it further, maybe it's a gem, but I didn't have the patience.

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