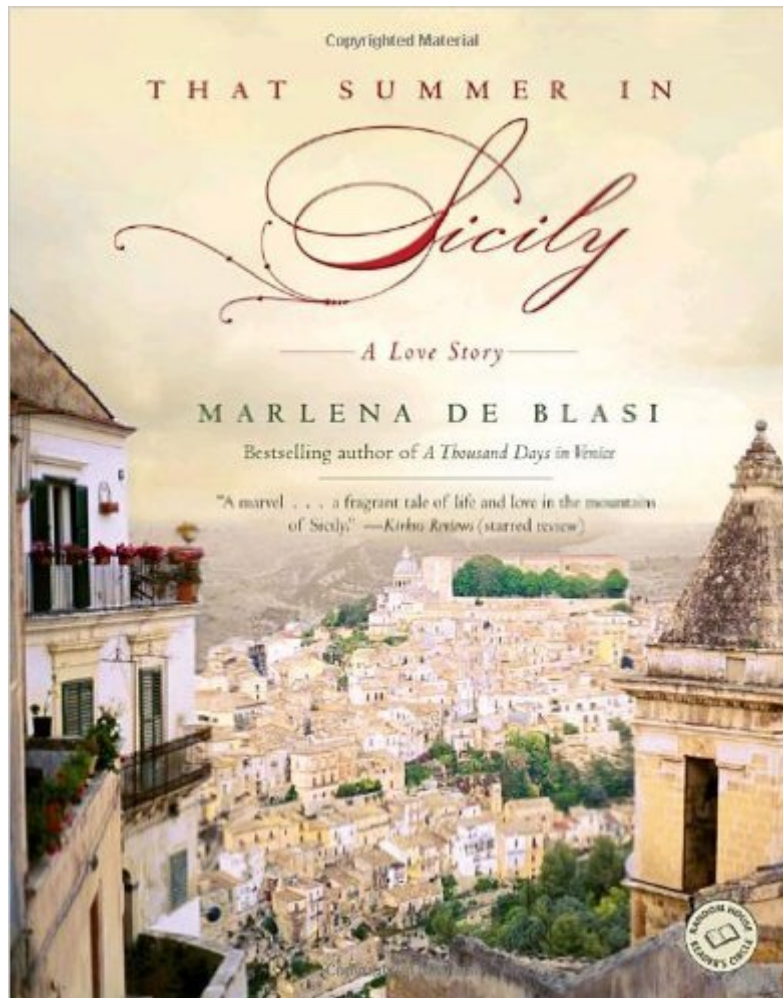


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That Summer In Sicily: A Love Story



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

That Summer in Sicily is the fourth Marlena de Blasi book I have read. When I picked up the first one, *A Thousand Days in Venice*, I didn't take to it right away. I am a Texan who writes exactly the way I speak, and I am irritated by flowery prose. However, I am also a sensualist, in love with taste, aroma, color, texture and sound. These elements--these things that define a particular place--come alive for me in these books. Unlike her previous three memoirs, this story is not really about American Marlena and her Venetian husband. It is an almost unbelievable love story, a story about what it means to be Sicilian. As with most other adventures in her life, this one began with a writing assignment. Marlena was asked by a scholarly magazine to write a seminal piece on the interior regions of Sicily. Several people had already turned the job down, and soon she discovered why. Despite a meticulously drawn route and prearranged interview appointments, she was met at every turn with "misanthropic silences, closed doors and epic heat." Eventually she gave up. Marlena's husband had come along for the ride, and before wending their way down from the mountains, they decided to take a day or two to recover. Finally, a policeman responded to their numerous inquiries for a place to stay. "There is a woman called Tosca. Her place is Villa Donnafugata (house of fleeing woman), although there's no sign to tell you so." When they entered the gates they found what looked like a castle with sweeping gardens. In fact, it was nothing more than a hunting lodge, once belonging to the last Anjou prince in Sicily. Everywhere, they passed groups of women in long black dresses, laughing and singing as they went about their daily chores.

This author can write! Her descriptions of people, environments, food and relationship are first class. Unlike the first three books that were memoirs of her travels and life with her husband, *A Thousand Days in Venice*, *A Thousand Days in Tuscany*, and *The Lady in the Palazzo*, this book is really Tosca Brazzi's story as told to Marlena. De Blasi descriptions of simple, everyday things are strong, such as: "Unskilled, unshy hands pounded scales on the piano." I could hear the music and see that person working the keys. What an interesting story de Blasi tells because of her chance meeting with a woman, now in her mid 60s, while traveling with her husband, Italian born Fernando. Tosca, the nine-year-old daughter of a peasant under the last prince in Sicily, was given to the prince by her father in trade for a stallion. She was educated along with the prince's young children and as she grew, became their teacher. A priest who knew her in the beginning described her as

having "splendid arrogance." At 18, Tosca became the mistress of Leo, the prince, now 36. When Leo disappeared mysteriously because his work for the people went against the local mafia, Tosca became an heiress. She carries on his work of modernizing some of culture. Sicily is like a major character in the book and we learn about many aspects of life there. The story today is of Tosca's role in helping women who are alone--many who come to the beautiful Villa Donnafugata (house of fleeing women) to live, and maybe to die. If you love good writing that is descriptive to the finest detail, read this book.

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