

Synopsis of

## **LOVE FROM THE ASHES OF WAR**

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Caught by the Nazi occupation of Vienne, Giulia Perlman escapes to Italy and becomes a wanderer until she is interned by the fascist government. Only the two small children are with her. Her husband and her family were all left behind.

Now, isolated in a small mountain village, she lives in a loft where the winter finds easy access through the casement openings. Standing by the window, wrapped in a blanket, she watches the colorless painting created by the slow drifting snow-flakes. She worries about her mother, sisters left behind. Her mind focuses on the Polish *stetl'* where she was born. She thinks of the affluent lifestyle she abandoned in Vienna, yet through it all, thoughts of the man from Sicily she met two nights before, keep taunting her mind. She is married. Why is she giving the Sicilian fellow a second thought?

Walking through the village one morning she encounters the man she would like to forget. They share an espresso and Giulia, against her better judgment, accepts an invitation to take a walk with him the next day. The attraction is mutual and a romantic tryst is born creating mental anguish and guilt feelings for Giulia.

As war moves closer to the village, her Sicilian lover convinces Giulia to escape with him to Naples and to freedom. The conflict is all around them. Air raids greet them upon their arrival in the city. Giulia witnesses as a neighbor watches the cold-blooded killing of her 18-year-old son who failed to report to the Germans.

Giulia, her two daughters, Tania and Laura, and the Sicilian friend, Salvatore, struggle through the Neapolitan uprising against the Germans,

the German reprisals, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius and the liberation by the American 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

As life goes normalizes, they set up a home and become Mr. & Mrs. Vittolo to all they meet. Sal starts a wine bottling business, acquires a partner and, when peace is declared in Europe, he takes his new family to Sicily to meet his parents and siblings. During their stay, when Giulia's religious belief is questioned, deep seeded hostility erupts between Sal and his siblings. The confrontation persists even after Sal's departure. Sisters, brothers and their respective spouses continue their harassment in an effort to dissuade Sal from marrying a Jewess; "the killers of Jesus," one sister expresses in Giulia's presence. Joining the effort to make Sal see the light, the family recruits the town's monsignor and the bishop, who threatens Sal with excommunication.

Sal and his adopted family are enjoying a comfortable life in Naples. The girls are attending school while the adults love the new friendships they have formed, most through the local Synagogue. A number of friends express their envy; Sal adores Giulia wholeheartedly, a love that most claim they no longer enjoyed in their own marriages, while others say they never had it.

Giulia confides that her luxurious home in Vienna would not compare to the villa they have rented in Naples, considering the splendid panoramic view their eyes embrace from above: Capri, Mount Vesuvius, Sorrento.

Finally, Salvatore's feud with his siblings becomes untenable and Sal concludes that the only thing to do is to leave Italy. He sells his share of the wine business to his partner and, with Giulia and the girls in tow, immigrates to Vienna where the girls' father, having survived a German concentration camp, has set up residence.

In Vienna, during a visit to her father's grave, Giulia recalls rebelling against her parents' religious upbringing. She asks for forgiveness; she tells her father, "I am wiser and making you proud."

The difficulties Sal encounters learning a foreign language are insurmountable, creating friction in the household. They discuss the possibility of returning to Italy when, during a casual phone call, Sal learns of his father's death. He flies to Sicily to be with his mother and, during his stay, realizes that his sisters, committed to the Church and its teachings, will not stop their harassment. For several weeks Sal remains absent from Vienna and when he returns to Giulia, she senses that Sal's feelings have changed. She enrolls the aid of a Rabbi however Sal's own religious upbringing reawakens. He returns to Sicily hoping to resolve his inner conflict.

What was to be a temporary stay extends to six months. Sal's letters become infrequent and the messages are less amorous. As he had promised, he does provide Giulia with a monthly check to meet her expenses in Vienna.

When Sal shows up unannounced, Giulia assumes he has decided to separate himself from his siblings. Instead, she has a rude awakening; he has come to bid a final good-bye.

Several months elapse when Giulia meets a young man, Gustav, at a New Year's party given by her ex-husband. The young man courts Giulia and gives her the moral boost she needs. She falls in love, not just with him, but with his family as well.

It is 1949, all of Giulia's searches for her mother and sisters have been in vain and, when Gustav asks her to marry him, she grasps at the chance to have a family once again.

Giulia returns to her lifestyle of years before. Gustav comes from an affluent family and is connected to the best of Viennese society.

Salvatore learns of the pending marriage and claims to have a change of heart. He wants Giulia back and offers to marry her. He travels to Vienna twice in a short time and threatens to interfere with her marriage.

Back in Sicily, realizing that Giulia is no longer his, Sal shows moments of mental instability. He vents his anger against his sisters, creating a mad scene during which he threatens everyone in the dining room with a kitchen knife.

Seven years elapse when Giulia receives a letter from Salvatore. He reaffirms his weaknesses, his love for her and her daughters and sends a veiled message of his impending suicide.