



*The*  
MANHATTAN  
CONFESSIONS

JOCELYN GREEN

*In*  
CENTRAL  
PARK  
3

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MANHATTAN  
CONFESSIONS

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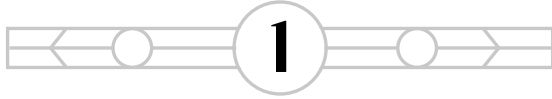
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*In memory of*  
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# CHAPTER



NEW YORK CITY

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1926

**J**ust because Ivy didn't love keeping secrets didn't mean she couldn't do it.

After one more scan to reassure herself she wasn't being watched, she climbed the stone steps and banged the brass knocker on the stately brownstone near the corner of West 79th Street and Amsterdam Avenue.

The door opened. "Ah, Miss Malone. The mistress is expecting you." Randolph welcomed her in and took her cloche and shawl.

"Thank you." She slipped her gloves into her handbag and smoothed her black bob.

With an unhurried gait, Randolph escorted her to the parlor, where he left her with a slight bow. Presiding over a tea table was Mrs. Adeline King, who insisted that Ivy call her by her Christian name. This grande dame of Manhattan was sixty-seven years old, her hair white and her face lined with age, but her violet eyes still sparkled.

"My dear." Adeline held out her hands, and Ivy pressed them gently in greeting, noting that Adeline's rings felt looser on her fingers than she'd remembered.

“Are you well?” she asked.

“I’m better than I deserve.” The same response, every time.

Pounding sounded faintly from the direction of the front door. Ivy frowned as she turned toward the noise, wondering if she’d been followed after all. “You’re not expecting someone else, are you?”

“Do you hear something?”

Ivy walked closer to the noise. “Hammering?”

“Ah!” Adeline smiled. “That’ll be my neighbor. He’s forever finding this or that to improve around here. He told me he would tighten the railings on the front steps. I guess today is my lucky day!”

“Berries!” Ivy relaxed. “A house like this is bound to need a little repair.”

“Quite so. I’ve tried to pay him, but he told me that takes the neighborliness right out of it and knowing I’m safe in here is payment enough. Have you ever?”

“I have never. Good neighbors can be harder to come by than a good handyman.” Smiling, Ivy returned to the tea table.

“Now please, indulge an old woman and enjoy this delicious spread Esther has prepared for us.”

“Believe me, I have no intention of resisting,” Ivy told her. “I’ve long since given up the quest for the flat and boyish figure that’s in vogue this decade.”

Adeline wrinkled her nose and shook her head. “A ridiculous fad. You’re wise to ignore it.”

“Did I ever tell you . . .” Ivy began, and Adeline leaned forward. The real purpose of this visit waited in her handbag, but it would keep. “When I was a student at Bryn Mawr, I was so desperate to fit in with the other girls, I made the mistake of ordering a rubber brassiere that promised to make me sweat away my bustline. Disaster! I gave up the experiment entirely within the week. I decided that I was a grown woman, after all. Why should I be ashamed to be shaped like one? Why should any woman?”

Adeline leaned back and laughed deep from her belly, a rattling but joyful sound. Ivy's story may not have been appropriate for high society, and neither was Adeline's uninhibited reaction, but Adeline hadn't always been "Adeline." The truth of her past had been scandalously fascinating—and worlds apart from the image she had spent a lifetime projecting.

Ensclosed in her Gilded Age mansion, the widow Adeline King had made a name for herself, not just for setting fashion trends but by leading the local Red Cross chapter, championing both the arts and the downtrodden throughout the city, and through the generous philanthropy made possible by her late husband's railroad investments. But what Manhattan didn't know, and the secret entrusted to Ivy, was that Adeline was born Margaret Kelly in County Cork, Ireland. She and her younger brother had immigrated to America in the 1870s and resorted to crime to survive. Today, not even a trace of an Irish accent remained, let alone any hint of her former rough-and-tumble lifestyle.

"A rubber brassiere! How miserable." Still laughing, Adeline swiped moisture from beneath her eyes, then slapped the table with glee, causing the silverware to rattle. "Oh, pardon me. My inner Molly is showing."

Ivy chuckled with her. Their visits had always been pure pleasure, it seemed, for both of them. With an Irish heritage on her father's side, and as an orphan who still struggled to know where she belonged, Ivy embraced the unlooked-for kinship with Adeline.

Rising, Ivy poured tea into a porcelain cup and stirred in two lumps of sugar before passing it to her friend.

"Speaking of Molly . . ." Ivy tended her own cup, then reached for a petit four covered in dark chocolate. "I finished her story. Your story. I'd like you to read it before I submit it to my boss."

"Yes! Read it aloud to me, please. My vision isn't what it used to be. But do eat your fill first."

Ivy happily complied, savoring the chocolate, then a tiny cucumber-dill sandwich. Adeline only nibbled the edge of an apple-and-pear tart. Perhaps she was too nervous about hearing her life story to eat more.

“Ready?” Ivy’s own nerves thrummed as she withdrew the folded papers and began to read.

It was all there. The break from her homeland, the passage to America and the trials of entering New York through Castle Garden. The hunger and confusion, the signs in business windows: Irish Need Not Apply. The wrenching poverty that drove her to steal and caused her brother to turn to fighting for money. His success had turned out to be both a blessing and curse, as it drew the attention of an Irish gang that recruited him into their fold. Before Molly knew it, she and her little brother were doing things they would have been ashamed of, were shame a luxury they could afford.

Ivy glanced up at Adeline but found Molly there instead, her eyes glossy with what looked like remorse or remembered pain. With a deep breath, Ivy continued:

“Things went from bad to worse once we were part of the gang. Our parents would have rolled in their graves to know what we had come to in this land of big promises and even bigger dreams. We’d become the people they would have warned us against. I was responsible for my brother, and now he was being trained not only to intimidate, extort, and fight dirty but to kill. My fifteen-year-old brother, who I had vowed to protect and look out for. I could see him in my mind’s eye, dangling over the fires of hell, so in danger was his mortal soul.

Oh, what wretches we had become in this country of opportunity. No one tells you when you come here that not all opportunities are golden. I would have done near anything to snatch him back. So when I saw my chance, I took it.”

Tears traced the grooves of the old woman's face as Ivy read her past back to her. At age seventeen, Molly had been directed to seduce a city alderman in order to blackmail him into protecting the gang. She seduced him, all right. But then she blackmailed him, not for the good of the gang but for her own good and her brother's.

“To my everlasting relief, the alderman accepted my terms in exchange for my silence about his entanglement with me. He secured a modest place for us in Brooklyn, made up a fictitious character reference so I could work for honest wages, and forged birth certificates for my brother and me to conceal our Irish heritage. The hardest part was training our speech patterns and accents so as not to spoil the ruse.

And so, my brother and I set about reinventing ourselves so we could be accepted in the neighborhood. I made sure my brother got a good education, and he later went into banking as the respectable citizen I knew he could be.”

As Ivy read the rest of the story chronicling her rise in status, she noticed her listener transform again, from scrappy and cunning Molly Kelly to stalwart and elegant Adeline King, famous philanthropist. Only her eyes betrayed the many layers of who she was.

“I'm not proud of my past exploits,” she said. “But if my story serves any purpose at all, I hope it will encourage wayward souls to turn their lives around and become upright, moral people who make meaningful contributions to society, making the world around them a better place.” With a rueful chuckle, she added, “Let's just pray they don't resort to seducing and blackmailing aldermen for a chance at a righteous life like I did, shall we?”

Ivy allowed herself a smile, the irony not lost on her. “I know, Adeline. I've recorded all of that in here, too.” She continued reading, and at last reaching the end, laid the papers on the table.

Adeline gripped her hand. “How you do weave a tale, Ivy dear.”  
“You made telling the story easy.”

She nodded. “That’s our Irish heritage. We’re born storytellers, you and me. It’s in our blood.”

Ivy warmed at the compliment, but even more so at the connection Adeline made between the two of them about their shared ethnic background. Ivy’s ancestry on her father’s side had roots in Ireland, but her forebears had come to America early enough to participate in the nation’s fight for independence. How she wished she could sit with her own parents or grandparents, recording their life stories. But they were all long gone. The only relatives she had left were her mother’s cousin Simona and her daughter, Gina, still living in Italy. Gina’s father had died, and while Ivy had begged Gina and Simona to immigrate to America, US immigration quota laws all but slammed shut that opportunity.

Ivy was grateful for Adeline’s generous spirit, and for her friends and roommates, Lauren and Elsa, who were surely better than sisters. Lauren was in Egypt on an archaeological survey, and when she returned home, she’d marry. Elsa was being courted, so Ivy could almost hear wedding bells for her, too. Of course Ivy was thrilled for both Lauren and Elsa, but she also knew everything was about to change. In a matter of months, Ivy would say good-bye to the roommates she’d had for years and find a new place to belong.

She pushed those thoughts to the back of her mind.

“Do you have any corrections?” She planned to turn Adeline’s story in soon, to be filed in the New-York Historical Society library with the other reminiscences they’d collected for this local history project.

The woman shook her head. “It’s just right the way it is. It sounds like me, only better. Thank you. And now, my dear, if you don’t mind, I’m ready for a good rest.”

Ivy helped her out of her chair and up the stairs to her bed-

chamber. “I don’t suppose your neighbor would consider installing an elevator in here for you, would he?”

“Oh no.” Adeline chuckled. “He’s too committed to preserving the integrity of the building’s history.”

“Thoughtful, handy, *and* historically minded? Sounds like a keeper, Adeline.” Ivy lowered her friend into the armchair by the window and tucked a blanket over her lap. “He wouldn’t also happen to be a bachelor who is secretly smitten with you, would he?”

Adeline’s eyes twinkled. “I’m quite sure I’m safe from that particular scandal. But he is a dear. If he’s still outside when you leave, bring him a napkin full of tarts, won’t you? He never turns down a pastry.”

Ivy agreed and promised to return for another visit soon, determined that their friendship would not end just because their task was complete.

“Promise me, again,” Adeline said, her tone suddenly serious. “Promise me you’ll never let anyone know that’s my story.”

“Your name won’t be attached in any way, and neither will your brother’s,” Ivy assured her. She wouldn’t even tell her boss who the source was, though she was sure he’d be eager to know. “Your secret is safe with me.”

“Be certain it is. I’m convinced there is value in sharing my story. But at my age, I don’t think I’d survive being found out.”

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Adeline’s parting words followed Ivy to the front door. No one had pressed Adeline into sharing her story, but Ivy supposed it was natural to have a case of cold feet. Still, what was the worst that could happen? The story would be filed away in the New-York Historical Society library, where only the most avid local history buffs would even learn of its existence.

Shaking off any misgivings, Ivy accepted her cloche and shawl from Randolph, then stepped out of the house and into a perfect late September evening.

And nearly onto the handy neighbor's toes.

Cobalt blue eyes sparkled above well-defined cheekbones. His genuine smile tugged one from her own lips. Honest to goodness, the man was a sheik, but he didn't know it.

"Tom." She laughed in surprise at meeting him here. "Behold, I come bearing tarts! Trade you." Looping her handbag over her wrist, she took the screwdriver from him and plopped the tarts into his palm.

"Apple-and-pear tarts?" He popped one into his mouth whole.

Tool in hand, Ivy spun to face the door. "Is this what you were after?" She waggled the door knocker, whose brass plate was loose on its screws. "Allow me." With a few quick twists, she tightened the plate onto the door and handed the screwdriver back to Tom as he swallowed the second tart.

"Say, that was nicely done," he told her.

"Lucky I was here."

Chuckling, he straightened his newsboy cap over his dark blond hair. "What *are* you doing here, by the way?" He reached into his pocket and lit a cigarette.

"I—" Drat. The truth danced on the tip of her tongue. She and Tom Lightfoot had become friends during the last few weeks, thanks to both of them tagging along with their courting room-mates, Elsa Reisner and Luke Dupont. It felt natural to simply explain that when the New-York Historical Society, where Ivy worked as a librarian, had put out a call for recollections of old New York, Adeline had sent her cook to the society, and Ivy had been the fortunate one to receive her.

"*My mistress has a story to tell of old New York, sure enough,*" Esther had said quietly. "*I guarantee none of the other old folks will tell you anything like it. Only she's not strong enough to write the words on the page herself. Neither will she fix her name on it. It has to be anonymous.*"

That's how Ivy's friendship with Adeline had begun, but she couldn't say any of that.

Tom was still waiting for her reply, although not impatiently. Watching her, he blew smoke from the side of his mouth.

Ivy took a shallow breath and half a step back. She didn't want to be rude, but she had never enjoyed the smell of cigarette smoke.

A wrinkle formed between his brows. He stepped back, too. "Am I bothering you?"

"*You* don't bother me, Tom. That's just not my favorite smell. I was dared into trying to smoke once in college, but it made me sick immediately. And I mean *sick*, right in front of all the people I wanted to impress—which only serves me right, I suppose—thereby curing a habit before it could even begin. Which is handy since Elsa can't stand being around smoke. Her compromised lungs can't handle it."

"Yes, I noticed."

She cleared her throat. "She told me you never smoke around her, and I think you're the bee's knees for it. A real pal."

"I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable, least of all either of you ladies." He looked at his Lucky Strike as though he'd love to take one more drag, but instead he put it out in one of the planters flanking the front door. Then he jogged down the steps and tossed the butt into the iron-ringed waste bin near the sidewalk. "Better?"

Ivy smiled brightly. "Much."

"And now will you tell me why you're here?"

"It seems we have a mutual friend in Adeline." The truth, but only one small slice of it. "She told me you've been a big help to her, making repairs, etc. That's really kind of you."

"She's a kind lady. Any repairs I can do for her are nothing compared to the warmth she's shown us over the years. Sounds funny to say it, but I do for her what I would do for my own grandmother, if I still had one living. Not that I expect Adeline to see me like a grandson by any stretch."

"You sure about that? She seems quite fond of you."

His measured smile seemed unconvinced. “But she knows I’m the son of a valet. And everyone knows that Adeline King is practically Manhattan royalty.”

Ivy bit the inside of her cheek to stop herself from saying anything to that. “Well, I better get going. Lauren’s cat will be wondering where her dinner is.”

He holstered his screwdriver alongside a hammer in the tool belt at his waist. “I’ll walk you home.”

Of course he would. “You may not be born upper-class, Tom, but you’re certainly still a gentleman.” Together they set off down the sidewalk, the setting sun at their backs.

## CHAPTER

# 2

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1926

Ivy couldn't stop smiling.

After years of researching her father's family tree and then months of suspense while her application was being reviewed, she would be inducted this morning into the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. At last, she would belong to a group of people who shared this spectacular thing in common: Their ancestors fought for America's independence. That made these ladies like family, didn't it? If nothing else, it was an automatic bond, and she was more than ready for that.

Here in the church where they held their meetings, forty ladies sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" and recited the Pledge of Allegiance before the meeting opened with prayer. A program followed on the topic of needlepoint samplers from the Revolutionary War era. The presenter, a chapter member named Sybil Carter Post, had brought several to pass around and invited comments and questions at the end.

Feeling bold, Ivy raised her hand. "I have one passed down from my father's side, done in 1783. It's on display at the New-York Historical Society—that's where I work—and you're all welcome to come see it anytime."

Sybil smiled warmly and added, “Mabel, please note that in the meeting’s minutes, won’t you? I’m sure we’ll all be interested to see it.”

Committee reports followed, and Ivy’s head whirled with all the good these ladies were doing. Some organized English language lessons for immigrant mothers, others worked on plaques and monuments for historic locations. There were book drives for schools, calls for donations for veterans of the Great War and sign-ups to visit them at hospitals, and advocacy for better conditions for wounded servicemen.

When it was time for the induction and Madame Regent Catherine Schuyler told Ivy to raise her right hand and repeat the oath, Ivy promised to uphold the Constitution and commit herself to the three pillars of the society: patriotism, education, and historic preservation. The mission of the DAR aligned perfectly with her career and personal passions.

Applause signaled the conclusion of the induction ceremony. Ivy was sure she was grinning like a schoolgirl, but she couldn’t help it. Her father would have been so proud of her. And somehow, though they were yet strangers, these fellow Daughters seemed proud of her, too. Or at least like they were glad she was among them. Everyone so far had seemed so welcoming, or as welcoming as one could be while also following parliamentary procedure. That was fine. Everything was fine. This was where Ivy belonged.

Sliding back into her chair, Ivy listened as the committee chairwomen gave their reports.

“Grace Whitney will now bring us a report from the Ellis Island Committee,” the regent announced, and a woman with fading blond hair and warm brown eyes stood. The number of pins on the blue-and-white DAR ribbon she wore spoke of years of service.

“As you know,” Grace began, “the work at Ellis Island directed by Miss Contessa is much needed and much appreciated. For

those who are not familiar, I'll briefly explain that when immigrants come to our great country, they are often detained at Ellis Island for days, possibly longer, for a number of reasons. Men and women are separated into different detention rooms, and it is our purpose to give the detained women something to do with their hands to pass the time. Some industry works wonders for their spirits, whether it is lacemaking, needlework, embroidery, or sewing, and they get to keep what they make. Our committee gathers materials for the purpose. The need is never-ending. So, ladies, please remember to bring your donations of fabric and notions to every meeting, and collect from friends and family as well."

What a grand idea. Ivy didn't have any scraps to offer, but she could gather donations at work, either from staff or from patrons. She reached into her handbag for a pen and paper, and drew out the mail she had grabbed from her mailbox at the Beresford on the way out this morning. She scanned the return address, and her heart flipped.

It was from Gina Manzoni, Milan, Italy. Her second cousin.

Too impatient to wait, Ivy opened the envelope and fished out the letter. Grace's voice grew fuzzy in her ears as she read.

*Dearest Ivy,*

*I never heard from you after my last letter and can only suspect you didn't receive it. My time is short, so I'll make this even shorter:*

*I'm moving to America—to New York! I'll take the train to Genoa on September 22, and then the next day, sail on the SS Roma. They say the voyage will take 10–12 days.*

*I pray to God I'll see you there.*

*Your loving cousin,  
Gina*

Dumbfounded, Ivy read the note again. Barring any unusual delay, Gina would be at Ellis Island next week! And it seemed as though she was coming alone, without her mother.

Suddenly snapping back to attention, Ivy looked up as Grace asked for another volunteer to serve on the Ellis Island Committee. Letter from Gina still in her grip, she shot up her hand. “I volunteer!”

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The rest of the meeting passed in a giddy blur. When the regent adjourned the gathering, Ivy wanted to bolt back to the apartment and tell Elsa her news, but she stayed a few minutes longer to chat with Grace Whitney instead.

“You’ll never believe the news I received this morning,” she blurted. “My cousin Gina is finally immigrating to America!”

Grace beamed, and pleasant lines fanned from the corners of her eyes. “That’s wonderful, dear! Oh, here, let me introduce you to my sister, Mercy. She’s on the committee, too.”

“Welcome aboard.” Mercy pumped Ivy’s hand. She looked to be Grace’s identical twin, the only difference between them being which side of the head they parted their hair on. Most likely in their fifties, they wore the same dress style—drop-waisted with a floral scarf tied in a bow at the base of a V-neck collar—but Grace’s dress was plum-colored, and Mercy’s was marigold. “Tell us a little bit about Gina and her family.”

“Gina’s grandmother and my grandmother were sisters, both born in Italy. Gina’s side of the family stayed, while my grandmother moved to America. But now Gina is ready to come, at last.”

“Oh goody” came a whispered voice from behind them. “Just what we need. Another Italian peasant.”

“She’s not a peasant,” Ivy countered. “She’s from Milan, in the north, and she’s fluent in English. Her family owned a newspaper shop and had their own printing press.”

“Well now.” Grace touched Ivy’s elbow in gentle solidarity. “Knowing English will put her in better standing than most who arrive at Ellis Island. Let’s just pray she stays healthy and that everything goes smoothly for her during the journey.”

“And after,” added Mercy. “The inspectors are very strict about the quota laws, you know.”

“Yes, I . . . I had heard that, yes.” Ivy’s initial enthusiasm bowed to a wave of apprehension.

“Why,” Mercy went on, “just six years ago, the number of Italians who immigrated to America was more than ninety thousand. Now, under that new immigration act, less than four thousand Italians are allowed in annually.”

It was October now. Ivy wondered how many had already come through. The quota laws had been one of Gina’s reasons not to attempt coming before. Something must have changed her mind.

“Are you sure about those numbers?” Ivy asked.

“My sister has made a special study of the topic since volunteering at Ellis Island. She’s always had a head for figures,” Grace offered. “We’ll all keep watch for Gina in the detention room.”

“Thank you.”

“One more thing, if you please.” Grace looked over her shoulder, then leaned in close, and Mercy did the same. “Don’t you pay any mind to that comment about Gina being a peasant. That remark was unworthy of us and doesn’t reflect our attitude as a whole.”

“I appreciate that,” Ivy told the twins. She hadn’t seen who had made that sarcastic comment, and she didn’t care to know. Right now, all she cared about was Gina getting here safely.

---

Twenty minutes later, Ivy burst back into her apartment.

“Well, hello! How did it—”

“Gina’s coming.” Ivy handed the letter to Elsa. “She’s my cousin from Milan. Did I tell you about her?”

“Maybe once or twice, in passing.” Elsa’s eyes widened as she read the note. “How wonderful!”

“Yes, it is!” Ivy laughed. “She could be here in a few days. That’s hardly any time at all to make arrangements.”

“She must stay here with us, of course. Lauren won’t be back until spring, and that bedroom is empty.”

Ivy tilted her head, brow wrinkling. “I thought of that, but I want to send her a telegram for her permission first. The Western Union office at Grand Central is open on the weekends.”

“Perfect, go ahead. She’ll get back to you as soon as she can, I’m sure. It just depends on whether she’s out on an expedition. But as for me, I’m happy to have a third here, especially since she’s your cousin. Has she ever been to America?”

Ivy kicked off her shoes and sat beside Elsa on the sofa. Cleopatra, Lauren’s cat, nuzzled her head beneath Ivy’s palm. “She hasn’t. My mother and I visited her family in Milan a couple of times, though. In 1911, we took my grandmother Caterina there and stayed for the summer. Well, Nona Caterina stayed the rest of her life. She had emigrated when she was young but missed the family she’d left in Italy. She didn’t want to say good-bye to her sister—Gina’s grandmother—again, so we left her there when we came home.”

“Wow.” Elsa curled her legs beneath her. “That must have been hard.”

“Harder for my mother,” Ivy admitted. “She had a strained relationship with Nona, probably because Nona never stopped pining for her homeland and ultimately chose to go back, even though it meant separation from my family. Three years later, in 1914, we heard Nona was sick, so we went back to see her one last time.”

“Wait a second. You were in Italy in 1914?” Elsa’s eyes flashed behind her glasses.

“Oh yes. We went in late May and were still there when Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated a month later. We would have stayed another two months, but with things heating up in Europe, my mother and I cut our trip short. That’s the last time I saw Gina. I was fifteen, and she was eleven. So she’s twenty-three now.”

“I think you mentioned her father passed away already, poor dear. Was she an only child?”

“She had an older brother, Eduardo, who actually came to live with my family in Philadelphia for a little while in 1913, when he was seventeen years old. He got along famously with my brother, Matthew, who was fifteen at that time. Then Eduardo left us to go work in the mines and send money home to his family. When the war broke out, he joined up to fight for Italy.”

Elsa sighed. “He didn’t come home, did he?”

“No. Gina and I have both lost our brothers. A terrible thing to have in common.” Ivy pushed back the emotion that always came with speaking of the loss.

Murmuring her sympathies, Elsa placed a comforting hand on her back.

With a sniff, Ivy shifted her focus back to her cousin. “At any rate, Gina helped her parents run their newspaper shop and took evening classes to improve her English, too. Eventually she worked only a little at the shop and found a job at one of the international textile companies. She did embroidery, but because she was fluent in English, she also communicated with English-speaking buyers. She’s industrious, smart, loyal, and kind. She’s the kind of girl we’d befriend even if I wasn’t related. I never dreamed she’d actually come, you know?” Ivy was talking too fast, but she couldn’t help but barrel on. “I do wonder why she didn’t mention her mother in her letter. Maybe Simona doesn’t want to leave the place her husband, Vito, was buried. We tried to persuade her entire family to move on our last visit, but Vito

felt that leaving Italy would be a betrayal. He was politically minded, and his newspaper showed it.”

“So patriotism runs in both sides of your family.” Elsa smiled. “I can’t wait to meet Gina.”

“Neither can I.” Ivy stood and headed for the door. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got a telegram to send.”