

## **Bianca and Rosa**

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An old widow finds the courage and tenacity to rescue a couple and their little girl near Mussolini's rump government at Salò, by kidnapping a Nazi general for a swap.

December, 1944, Hitler has installed Mussolini's phony government at Salò, Northern Italy, as the allies advance. An elderly widow, Bianca, works in a factory in the town of Padenghe, and earns extra cash washing laundry for the factory owner, Vito. Detective Mazzini is told that Vito's wife, Evelina, is a Jew, and he places Evelina and Vito under arrest. As the arrests are taking place, Bianca sneaks their daughter, Rosa, away from the factory and hides her with her son, Nicolo, who is a partisan fighting against Mussolini. Rosa, eight years old, beautiful and pampered, had treated Bianca, burly and homely, as a lowly servant. Now her fate is dependent upon Bianca's efforts to protect her.

Rosa is not told about the arrest, and does not want to stay in the forest cabin of Nicolo. She tries to return to Padenghe riding a neighbor's horse, but Nicolo returns her to the cabin, with the promise to ask Bianca to take her back to town. The old ladies of the factory agree to sneak Rosa back into the factory, past a police guard, by disguising Rosa as a religious novice who has been asked to translate for a foreign buyer. Detective Mazzini briefly attends the meeting, but doesn't realize that Rosa was within his grasp.

Due to the German effort to set up Mussolini's government in Salò, Italians must do the German's bidding, including Mazzini, who reports to Commandant Kraus. Kraus has recently returned from the largest battle to date with the partisans, and defeated a force of 6,000. Kraus wants Vito and Evelina (and Rosa when she is captured) deported to the camps, but Mazzini says he must first report to his superiors after Christmas. Bianca has assured Rosa that she will be with her parents for Christmas.

Mazzini has Gianna, a woman from the factory, jailed, to pressure her to help capture Rosa, with the promise of giving her the factory as a reward. Bianca learns that Anna was the quisling that fingered Evelina, although not Jewish, in order to receive reward money, and get herself released by Mazzini. Bianca forces Anna to go to Mazzini and recant what she told him about Evelina. Mazzini has Bianca and Anna jailed, but then releases them. Anna agrees to help Bianca kidnap a German military officer to swap for Vito and Evelina.

They kidnap a General while he goes for a late night swim in the lake, and in the process capture one of Mazzini's men, and a military guard. The Germans agree to swap prisoners, according to instructions. They are told to bring Vito, Evelina and Gianna to Tremosine, a small town perched high above the lake. Nicolo arranges for a climber to scale a cliff, and relay the real swap plan to Vito, Evelina and Gianna. Bianca transports her prisoners toward the swap point, but must stop when the prisoners try to escape. The partisan leader intercepts them, and tells Bianca that they will hang the General in the morning. Bianca drugs the partisans, and brings the prisoners to the swap location, where they are locked up.

The prisoner swap is to take place in front of German military HQ. As Vito, Evelina and Gianna are waiting for the swap, a Christmas eve procession passes. Bianca, dressed as a priest, rings a bell, mayhem results, Vito, Evelina and Gianna escape in the confusion. Mazzini finds the General and officers, and instructs them on what they must say after their release. On Christmas morning Bianca brings Rosa to be reunited with her parents. It takes a village to fight extremism.