

Past Imperfect, Future Tense

A woman's struggle to transcend her past

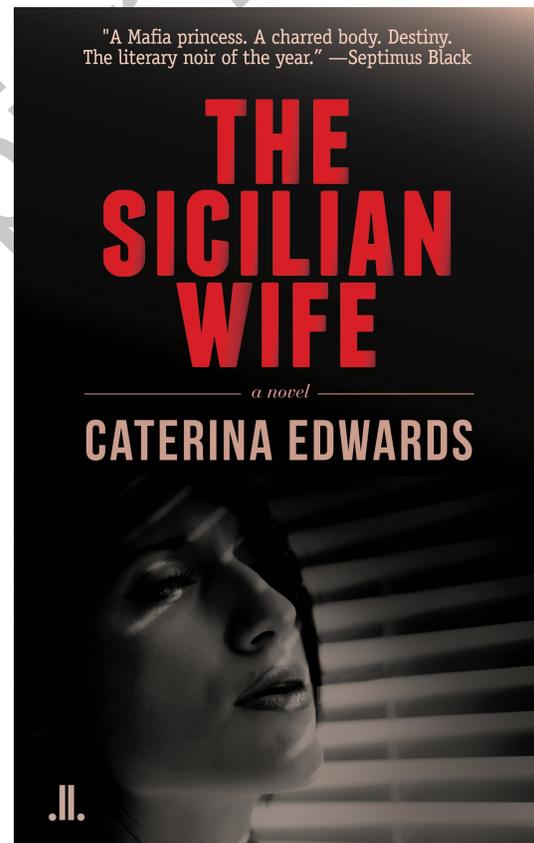
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

When her husband is killed in a car crash on a mountain road in Sicily and his identity is not immediately clear, the news takes it's time reaching his wife Fulvia, in Edmonton, Alberta. When it does, her reaction is calm, not to say cold. It is only one of many anomalies about the man and his wife, and sets Marisa De Luca, the senior officer in charge of the investigation in Italy, to wondering just who—and what—she is dealing with. It's just the beginning of a coming-of-age tale of two women, each trying to forge their identities in the face of very different challenges.

Fulvia Acuri had come to learn early in life that she was not an ordinary child, but someone who was a Mafia Princess: her behavior was subject not only to the traditional values of Sicilian family life, but also to the strict code of the Cosa Nostra. Together these constraints left Fulvia very little room to chart her own course in life. But as she matures she battles to navigate her way between her family's

values and her own desires. She gradually develops the strength of character to forge her own path in life, one free from her family and their activities. But the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.



From the outset Marisa De Luca's investigation of the car crash seems to be in trouble. She comes to the job with impressive credentials: her undercover work had resulted

in over thirty members of a paramilitary group being convicted, for which she had received a special citation from the Minister of Military Justice, qualities that should have earned her a measure of admiration and respect. But instead she finds herself posted to Alcomo, a police station in a backwater town, isolated from her former mentor, and leading a group of sexist officers who are openly contemptuous of her rank and her gender.

As the story unfolds we learn of Fulvia's early efforts to escape the chilling shadow of her family, and as an adult she seems at last to have succeeded, moving to Canada, marrying another of Italy's children, and establishing a successful business. But the Old Country beckons with an irresistible strength, and a journey back will set in motion events that draw everyone within a vortex of violence. Even those who have elected to remain in Italy will discover that the past can return to menace the present.

A novel that is both a literary novel and a work of crime fiction, *The Sicilian Wife* offers satisfaction on many levels. The author deftly interweaves a criminal investigation with a backstory of first the child, then the adult, finally the widow of the victim. But who, here, is the victim—the husband

who died in a fiery car crash in Sicily, or his enigmatic wife, at home half a world away? What led Fulvia all the way to Edmonton? Is the story about a single criminal act, or does it concern many actions, involving the struggle of two very different women to assert one's identity in two not-so-different male-dominated worlds? For like Fulvia, Marisa De Luca's journey is no less nuanced, her actions no less informed by all that has come before.

The Sicilian Wife is a fine, textured tale that both entertains and informs. Readers will want to follow the work of its gifted and award-winning author, Caterina Edwards.

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