





# **GAME OF HEARTS**

**Leilac Leamas**





© 2024 OCTÁVIO VIANA | SILENT PEN ®  
**GAME OF HEARTS**

Published in the USA and EU

First printing 2025 (1st Edition)

This book has been proofread and edited by Murray and Octávio Viana

Internal Reference: SP2025.032 | 09.02.2025 | 20:31

[silentpenltd@gmail.com](mailto:silentpenltd@gmail.com)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without prior written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations used in critical analyses or certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.



*For the Players of Hearts,  
No Simple Prisoners of Fate,*

*This book is dedicated to all those who carry the scars of a lost love on their chest, but still dare to dream of winning it back. To those who don't give in to the silence of absence and turn longing into courage. To those who understand that love is not just a destination, but a journey, made up of falls, reunions and a tireless desire to write a new beginning.*





# Prologue

They call them *safe houses*. Places where the footsteps of the world don't reach, where time slows down and the rush of everyday life loses its meaning. In these places, which the world doesn't reach, the weight of my struggles, the pressures on me, dissipate like smoke in the wind.

For someone like me, who has lived for years in the game of secrets and truths that can't be told, jumping between here and there, fighting this and that, defying monsters, giants and even the law itself, these houses are much more than hiding places. They are safe havens, carefully chosen pieces of peace that allow me to be reborn each time.

The houses are not just safe. They are homes in places where my soul feels welcomed, where the smells of the earth and flowers mark memories and bring promises of the future. Houses that invite me to live the simplicity of a day, without codes to decipher, courts to face, giants to defeat or missions to fulfill. Each of them holds pieces of what I am and, perhaps, what I want to be.

In the south of Spain, there's a secluded farmhouse where the orange trees lean under the weight of the fruit, and the air, sweet and fragrant, is my gift of tranquility to myself. In the Alentejo, Portugal, a whitewashed house rests in the middle of golden fields, with starry nights offering an almost timeless serenity, where only the rustle of olive trees can be heard.

In Palermo, between the chaos of the streets and the smell of the sea, there is a hidden apartment, old but tidy, where the past unfolds around

every corner until it reaches the Teatro Massimo, the stage for so many operas, almost like my life.

In Ferrara, or nearby, in an unknowable and secret place, forgotten by time, there is a silent, huge house, a refuge among fields and ancient trees, which makes me disappear, even from myself.

And then there's Milan. The city that never stops, where the frenetic pace of life contrasts with my need to pause, where I sometimes hide in the heart of the hustle and bustle, a place to watch the movement without being seen, to feel the energy without being consumed by it. A small, old apartment on the second floor is a place to escape without running, to hide without being hidden, to be in the center of the hustle and bustle without letting myself be agitated.

There's one more, on the edge of an olive grove in Tuscany, where the aroma of wine and fresh bread reminds me that life has flavors that dangers can never erase. It's near where the sound of the sea draws the perfect melody for peaceful sunrises and the sunset sings designs in the clouds for unforgettable dinners.

Each of these houses is more than a shelter; it's a part of me. They are places where I can escape from the world and, paradoxically, find myself in it. They're where I turn off the masks and allow the man behind the writer, behind the spy, behind the litigator, behind the conspirator, behind the vigilante—or at least aspires to—to breathe. Because, in the end, we all need places like this—not just to hide, but to live fully. These houses are as much a refuge for the body as they are for the mind and heart.

But as charming as these houses are, there is something that escapes me, something I can't reach. Each one is a meticulously chosen refuge, surrounded by beauty and silence, but they all carry an absence that I can't ignore. That flower I loved is missing, the unmistakable perfume that should be by my side when I wake up, filling the void with the simplicity of a gesture and a breath.

It's an emptiness that I carry with me, the space left by her. Because, in the end, what's the point of a perfect sunrise, with the sound of the sea and the smell of freshly-brewed coffee, if she's not there to share it?

What's the point of having dinner at sunset, with the sky painted in shades of pink and orange, if the chair next to me is empty?

## GAME OF HEARTS

I've decided: I can no longer accept living like this. I need to face what I lack. That's what I want now and I've decided to seek it out—or perhaps regain it. Because without it, these places are nothing more than scenery. Beautiful, yes, but immobile. Places that shelter me, transform me, serenade me, but don't complete me.

I want more than hiding places.

I want more than the security of well-chosen walls.

I want the whirlwind of emotions, the chaos of a shared love, the imperfect moments that make life real.

I want the restlessness that only love brings, the warmth of being by her side and feeling that, in the midst of chaos, everything is exactly as it should be. And that's what I'm looking for now.

I want to take the risk. I want to open the door.

This isn't just a new page, it's a new book. I'm leaving behind the devil's puzzles, the pawn gambits and the writer's labyrinths. Now it will be a different game—a game without masks. A game of love and courage—a game of hearts.

This time, I won't back down. And this time, I can't lose.

\*\*\*



# 1

## *Suspended Time*

Palermo, March 2025

There are places that call to us, not because of the immediate comfort they offer, but because of the promise of something deeper: a connection with the past, with the soul of things. Palermo is one such place. There, time seems to move at a different pace, as if the hours stretch lazily between the old alleys, the open-air markets and the smell of the sea that mixes with the fruit sold in the square. Everything moves slowly, as if each moment had to be savored before it passed. Everything seems to be articulated in such a way as to create resistance to the modern world, in a celebration of what doesn't change.

I chose Palermo because I needed that break, that controlled disconnection. The promise of apparent calm, of the possibility of disappearing into a world where time is not measured by appointments, but by the natural rhythm of people, was what appealed to me. It was as if, there, time had a different texture, denser and more palpable. And, for some reason, that small apartment in a narrow alleyway in the historic center fulfilled that promise.

People in Palermo live with an almost disarming simplicity. They sit outside their homes chatting in the late afternoon, while children play in the streets in no hurry to grow up. The women talk loudly to each

other, with large gestures accompanying each sentence, while the men gather in small groups, discussing something that always seems urgent but never desperate. There is something deeply human about those meetings, a genuine sharing that contrasts with the superficiality of relationships in big cities. In Palermo, people live with each other, not just next to each other. I wanted to feel that, to be so much a part of that world, that life.

The mild weather always makes Palermo seem suspended in an endless spring, where the heat is never excessive and the cold is just a breeze that calls for a light jacket. And I, in the midst of it all, felt almost invisible, a mere observer of a world that continued to spin without the urgency that my life had imposed on me in recent years.

And that's what I was looking for. A place where I could simply exist, without expectations, without pressure.

Camilla interrupted my thoughts with a direct, blunt question, "when do we move to Scopello?"

The question was accompanied by a firm but not aggressive look. Camilla was sitting on the small beige fabric sofa with a cup of coffee between her hands, her clear eyes fixed on me while the light filtered through the aged curtains barely illuminated the room.

"As soon as the house is ready," I replied, trying to sound more confident than I really was.

Camilla sighed, visibly disappointed. "These jobs should have been finished in January. You don't seem to care about the house anymore. You've been putting it off for no apparent reason."

"I've been doing my best," I replied, keeping my voice calm. But deep down, I knew there was an uncomfortable truth in her words. Somehow, without understanding exactly why, I had neglected the jobs. It felt like I was deliberately putting off that chapter of our lives.

"The house in Scopello is beautiful, facing the beach, spacious, bright..." Camilla insisted, with a somewhat frustrated tone. "This apartment is tiny, without a garage, in an alley where the light barely comes through the windows. I don't understand why you want to stay here."

I looked around, taking in the cozy atmosphere, despite its simplicity. "It's a tidy house, full of life and right in the center of Palermo. We're just a stone's throw away from everything, from life, from movement."

## GAME OF HEARTS

She rolled her eyes, exasperated. “We could go to Le Lavandou, to my house. The days are getting longer, spring is coming. It would be perfect.”

“Now, the simple life of Palermo is what we need.” I said this in a firm tone, almost to convince myself. “We need to detox from the world and the life we left behind.”

Before Camilla could answer, the familiar high-pitched sound of my secure phone, the Bittium, interrupted the conversation. That phone hadn’t rung for months. I picked it up quickly, knowing it could only be Toscin.

“Toscin,” I greeted, moving away to a side room where Camilla couldn’t hear.

“How’s your seclusion in Palermo going?” Her voice rang with its characteristic tone of sarcasm.

“A necessary cure,” I replied. “I needed this.”

“Great, but you’re going to have to take a break from your treatment. I need you to leave for Paris. We have a new mission. Huge and very lucrative.”

“Paris?” I frowned, trying to process the information.

“Yes, at the Peninsula Hotel, in two days’ time. You’re going to meet Antoine Jeannot, a French lawyer, linked to the NUPES Party and with connections to the Democratic Party in the US.”

I sighed, not sure if that proposed break in my new Sicilian life was a welcome distraction or a new curse. “Understood. I’ll be there.”

After hanging up, I sat in silence for a moment, processing the abrupt change of plans.

When I returned to the living room, Camilla was no longer there. I found her in the bedroom, in front of the mirror, combing her long blonde hair, getting ready to go out.

“I need to go to Paris on business. In two days,” I announced, trying to sound casual.

She turned around with an unexpected smile. “It’s good to get out of this town. I was tired. It’ll be nice to go to Paris.”

“I’m going alone,” I added, watching her expression change. Before she could protest, I reminded her, “We were there just last month,” then suggested, “but you could take the opportunity to go to Le Lavandou, to spend a few days with Jasmin.”

Camilla put down the brush, staring at me with the full weight of disappointment and a hint of sadness in her eyes. “You’re different, distant. You don’t seem to want me to be a part of your life any more. You haven’t touched me for weeks, we haven’t made love. Is something bothering you? Have I done something wrong?”

I moved closer and, without answering directly, kissed her, trying to dispel the doubts that surrounded her.

She didn’t say anything, but returned the kiss with intensity. And at that moment, words weren’t necessary. It was just me and her, trying to recover what had been lost between the work on the house in Scopello and... who knows what else.

With my fingers, I gently brushed away the strands of hair that were stubbornly falling over her face, feeling the warmth of her skin against mine. When our lips met again, urgency took hold of us, an urgency that didn’t ask for permission, it just happened, as if we needed to undo the distance we had let grow between us.

I trailed my kisses down her neck, while my hands slid down her back, finding the thin straps of her dress, which I slid gently down her shoulders.

Camilla closed her eyes, letting out a sigh that seemed to carry with it all the tension that had been accumulating. The dress slid down her body like a memory slowly unraveling, until all that was left was her bare, warm skin. I kissed her breasts with a devotion I couldn’t explain, only feel, absorbing her response with every touch of my lips.

In a move that caught me off guard, Camilla climbed onto my lap, her legs entwined around my waist, holding onto me as if I were the anchor that kept her from getting lost. The pressure of her body against mine brought an unsettling familiarity, as if we were repeating something old, but at the same time starting afresh.

I got up and took her with me to the dressing table, where I carefully sat her down without ever interrupting the kiss.

The mirror reflected us, but I avoided looking, preferring to concentrate on the texture of her skin, the sound of her breathing, the way her body responded to mine. I carefully sat her down and, with a firm hand, pulled her panties down, the thin fabric giving way easily, as if she had been waiting for this moment too.