

PHOTOGRAPH WEDDING

Flick, flick, flick. Valentina shook her umbrella and little rivulets of rain ran onto the platform. One stray spot spread and darkened the pale cotton of her dress as she clambered awkwardly onto the train. It was full of steaming, excited soldiers going home on leave and they did not give her a second glance as she clumsily negotiated the overcrowded corridor. Just a plump, middle-aged woman with white hair and a pleasant, rosy face carrying a cardboard suitcase and a wet umbrella.

After five minutes of ungainly progress, Valentina finally found what she was looking for; a seat on one of the hard, wooden benches. She thankfully threw a small cushion down onto the polished wood and heaved her suitcase onto the rack. All she had to do now was wait.

This morning, early, it had been fine with no premonition of the coming storm. She had got up as usual at six, thrown out yesterday's pasta scraps to the ecstatic, lean cats who wound round her ankles and looked regretfully at the geraniums, vivid against the snowy, white wall of the cottage. She would have liked to have planted roses too. She had walked easily down the road in her faded apron and looked out at the deep, turquoise waves and jagged black rocks. The beauty she had shared with Antonio. But now it seemed such a long time ago and she had no regrets.

Valentina sat upright on her wooden seat, full of trepidation yet determined on her folly. The train jerked into motion, the sun came out and the soldiers cheered as she reflected that, incredibly, it was only one month since the first letter had arrived.

It had all started far away in a small village near Rome. On that wartime morning, the bar was crowded with workers drinking coffee "corrected" with cognac before going off to the fields. One man remained seated, staring morosely at the sawdust covered floor as he smoked a cigarette. This was Aventurero. Aventurero was as fine

