

been able to detect any discrepancies between the original and the reproduction.

These three suspects were questioned but all claimed to know nothing about it, and it turned out that the only one Behr considered a serious candidate—the old artist—had been in hospital for the past two months with rheumatoid arthritis. He was obviously innocent. For now, the investigation found itself at a dead end. The forgery still hung in the Italian wing of the Museum, and the whole affair remained a very closely guarded secret.

II

Extracts from the Diary of Tibor Vida

Palermo, 5th of March

What a fine place Sicily is! I don't believe there's another spot like it in all the world: rugged, snow-capped peaks, green plateaux, hillsides covered in vineyards and olive trees; even oranges by the coast! Up close, a grove of lemon trees can feel as lush and verdant as any equatorial jungle! And everywhere you go you're confronted by that sparkling sea, beneath a sky of cloudless blue...

I've already taken the new Lancia out for a spin. This is first-rate country to explore by motor car, with a fresh vista around every corner. What a stroke of luck that the fellow

from the Austrian consulate was transferred and had to sell his car at short notice—right when I needed a new set of wheels! All I had to do was change the plates for Hungarian ones. She's an absolute beauty, and in a completely different class from any car I've owned before—the thing practically drives itself!

This, I should say, is only the fifth day since my arrival in Palermo, but I've done plenty of sightseeing already and it's a really splendid spot. I don't have much of a head for history but I know a thing of beauty when I see it, and I've never seen anything like this. There's Monreale, Cefalù, the Cappella Palatina... I've been slogging manfully through the museums, churches and palaces, and while there is no end of history to get to grips with, it's surprisingly pleasant to loiter in some pretty courtyard or other. Another thing I've noticed is that the tour guides here aren't quite so confoundedly importunate as in the rest of Italy: some are even capable of leaving you alone for five minutes if you want to take your time over something. Is it the Arab blood in this part of the country that gives them a mellower outlook on life? But then I've just read that the Spanish and the Greeks—even the Normans—ruled these parts for centuries too, so maybe they picked it up from them.

I'm staying at the Excelsior. It's a very fine hotel, and from my top-floor perch I can survey the whole city, right out to the bay, or towards the splendid bulk of Monte Pellegrino. I had a piano brought up to my room so I can work on my