

Bella Sophia glanced down from her high perch over the bay. Peeking between the huge fig tree and blackberry trellises, was one of her very favorite aunties! Bella Sophia could see a giant wooden sloped bowl balanced on the top of Aunt Mary's head.

"Go quickly and help her before she stumbles and falls," urges Nonna. "You would think she's married to that old couscous platter. We need her skilled hands."

Bella Sophia takes off, bolting down the long walkway. Transforming semolina flour into couscous is a laborious job. Bella Sophia smiles, grateful to have Aunt Mary's skilled hands join the efforts.

Nonna observes from the roof top deck, warning "careful ... my basil."

At the foot of the steps Bella Sophia easily bounds over the basil seedlings. Skillfully shimmying she sways through the rows of herbs, racing around the old apricot tree, scurrying over lines of fava beans and darting past the Italian prunes. Breathlessly she runs to Aunt Mary at the ancient fig tree.

Minutes later, Aunt Mary and Bella Sophia manage to lug the enormous couscous rolling bowl up the two flights of rickety stairs. The exhausted duo plopped down on deck chairs, "Mama-mia" they exclaim.

A bit winded, Aunt Mary inches closer to Bella Sophia, "How was school this week?" she asks.

Bella Sophia confides, "Auntie, I absolutely hated it! Awful, terrible. I am so glad it's the weekend! I never want to go back, I can't stand it there, it gets worse by the day. I want to stay home with my Nonna. The girls are so cruel. First it was the clothes I wore, teasing me that I wear hand sewn clothes. Then they laughed at the bows in my hair. Today, they said I have big, ugly, giant hands... and that no one will ever love me!"

"Andiamo, come over here," Aunt Mary beckons.

Bella Sophia snuggles into her open embrace sinking down into the warm folds of her lap. Big crocodile tears begin to flow.

"Hold up your hands Bella Sophia," orders Aunt Mary.

Aunt Mary holds up her own hands to mirror Bella Sophia. "Frances, Frances come here," she cries.

Nonna rushes over.

"Frances hold up your hands," says Aunt Mary.

Now Bella Sophia, Auntie and Nonna are all comparing outstretched hands.

“See,” Auntie Mary continues. “You still have a way to go to catch up to us! Those girls are jealous. Pay them no attention.”

Auntie Mary looked directly into Bella Sophia’s eyes, “These hands, your hands,” she squeezes Bella Sophia’s hands for good measure, “these beautiful strong hands of yours are a blessing.”

Auntie Mary continues, “These hands will find and pick the ripest of figs.”

“Hold a needle to make beautiful embroidery,” adds Nonna.

“Cut pasta so fine to nourish babies,” Auntie shares.

“Can tomatoes for a delicious sauce,” contributes Nonna.

“Hold the books that will give you knowledge,” nods Auntie.

“Count the rosary to say your prayers,” asserts Nonna.

“And the best part,” Nonna continues.

“The very, very, very best part,” encourages Auntie Mary. “These wonderful, blessed beautiful hands will make the most delicious...”

“the most wonderful,” sings Nonna.

“Couscous!” cheers Bella Sophia. “Let’s get moving, we have lots of hungry mouths to feed.”