



***Siracusa, by Delia Ephron***  
***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, January 2017***

Delia Ephron and her sister, the late great Nora Ephron, are best known for their witty romantic comedies. Delia, in particular, wrote and produced the movie *You've Got Mail*, starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. At first glance, readers might assume that her new novel *Siracusa* would be a light-hearted romp with a travel twist. As it turns out, only one part of that equation is correct.

Indeed, *Siracusa* is a travelogue of sorts. The sun-kissed Sicilian city (Syracuse in English) takes center-stage in the novel, which is rich with colorful details. More Greek than Italian, Siracusa, on the east coast of Sicily, was the birthplace of Archimedes. In fact, there are more Greek ruins in Siracusa than in any major Greek city. And then there's the food...!

The storyline of *Siracusa* hinges on two American couples vacationing together. Michael, a famous playwright, and his wife Lizzie, a journalist with a faltering career, hope that this trip will improve their troubled marriage. They decide to travel to Italy with Lizzie's former boyfriend Finn and his social-climbing wife Taylor, with an extended stay in Siracusa. Taylor is overly protective of their precocious 10-year-old daughter Snow, and she insists that the girl come along on their trip.

Michael, who had won the Pulitzer in his early twenties, has been struggling for years to complete another successful play. He has had numerous affairs and basks in the attention Taylor and Snow give him, much to Lizzie's annoyance. Finn, who still cares for Lizzie, wants to protect her from further hurt, in his own clueless way. As with the volcano Mount Etna looming in the background, everything is bubbling near the surface, ready to erupt.

For sure, *Siracusa* is not a frothy romantic comedy by any means. The ancient city, with its "decayed elegance," is a metaphor of sorts for the characters' deteriorating relationships. Still, Delia Ephron's considerable writing skills are evident, no matter how dark the journey.