Let’s dance…

Monica walks towards us across the terrace of the café restaurant, with a cheerful smile on her face, and dark sunglasses. A gazebo, tables and chairs, beach umbrellas on wooden planks. We follow her down a short flight of steps, sweeping past the boathouse of the club. Her dive center is ‘scattered,’ circling between sun and shade, rock, terraces, and painted wooden sheds. A small sitting room shaded by a canopy appears to be the classroom. On the vertical rock, a fishing net holds up the logo of the dive center: Blue Aura Diving Club. Down, towards the light, a small, sandy bay opens up; one of those places that either you know them, or you find them by chance on Google Earth, and right away you wonder how you’ll ever reach them. There are many of us, and little room to move: just a trail carved out of the rock.

Monica will make it, I know it; her staff is top class. I met her in Sharm el Sheikh, the place dear to my heart that I often portray as New York of scuba diving. We were together in the management of a huge event, something like (if I remember right) 500 plus scuba divers at sea for an entire week. Of course, there were 40 of us instructors on around twenty boats, and with an army of tank boys, so all went well. It was like being in the trenches, a real baptism by fire, but with hilarious implications.

Only if safety is your priority you can dare laugh at the setbacks.

Conjunctions of a more practical than astral nature force me to travel really light. I need a full kit. But what worries me is the wetsuit. From three dives a day to fifty a year, sizes change.

“Be honest, you didn’t bring yours ‘cause it was too big! Oh, loose wetsuits, same as not wearing one!” Puccio Di Stefano makes the joke as he’s getting into his dry suit. I know him by name, but now he’s right in front of me, taking the piss. He doesn’t even spare Claudio, his buddy… as much as anyone can call buddy the diving partner of a videographer. Puccio makes fun of him for his expensive jumpsuit, “I wear whatever I like under my dry suit. If I don’t have to stay underwater for days anything goes, especially whatever I’ll be wearing at the restaurant after the dive.” I’m about to reply with a joke on Bond and his tux under the dry suit… but it’s time to go. A zodiac packed of scuba equipment takes us from the beach to the boat.

Citizen Science fellows have their fair share of laughs. We’re on a boat doing something we love, in order

to offer our dive profiles to the researchers from DAN. We're not Bond or Navy Seals, the ones who tested the first modern-day dive tables. We're divers of all ages, half men and half women, half sea dogs and half beginners. Some are fit, some less, some have a thousand dives and others only ten. We're the ones you meet at the movies or at the supermarket, the ones who fill dive forums with emoticons, the protagonists of real-life statistics.

Capo Zafferano is our safety dive today. In 'Le Formiche' the sea is rough, and coming back to the boat can be heavy for the less experienced. It's as plain as day that Monica is disappointed not to be able to show this gem to her guests. Every dive guide goes through this dilemma. The visibility close to the coast is bad because of the rains that brought a lot of suspended particles. We take our time admiring a fan worm, and lose the rest of the group, just like when I was diving with the seals. My buddy is here. I take her hand. Let's dance.