

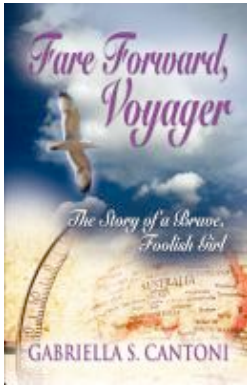


Fare Forward, Voyager

*The Story of a Brave,
Foolish Girl*



GABRIELLA S. CANTONI



Sofia is a headstrong Italian teenager who longs to escape her repressive parents and attend medical school, but accedes to their demand that she travel a different course. Hers is a life of picaresque adventure, in London, Rome, Naples, Sydney and Geneva - falling in and out of love, enduring debt and deprivation, glorious highs and crippling lows. But no matter how challenging the voyage, she fares on, sometimes thoughtfully, sometimes impetuously, to the journey's end.

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DEDICATION

For my grandchildren, Ariella, Brendan, Ethan and Elliot

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to my friend Allison Foster, who helped me start this book, and my gratitude to my daughter Allegra for her suggestions and encouragement.

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PREFACE

I have traveled extensively, but never to Australia, where much of this story takes place. Australia seemed the perfect representation of the romance and wonder of travel—an intriguing, distant destination I'd never experienced, people and places I'd never seen. I studied many maps, brochures and books to learn about the country, "traveling" there with my mind and heart. From these travels, and from the words of T.S. Eliot, my favorite poet, Sofia's adventures in this book were born.

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.*
-T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*

Chapter 1 – August 13

August 13th was a pivotal day in my life.

That day, August 13th, was my 21st birthday.

I was grateful for that day from the deepest corners of my heart.

I took two suitcases from my closet and filled them with dresses, shoes, underwear. Our family was well-to-do and more. Whatever I chose would be stylish, of good quality. But would it be right in an unknown future, in a new life—that would at last be all my own—and Massimo's? I had no idea where or when I would be wearing anything other than what I had on at that moment—my traveling outfit.

But there was no time to think now. Massimo was waiting at the station. I looked around my room—my books, my childhood dolls, my scrapbooks and pictures. My final look—forever?

All left behind—forever?

I thanked them as well and went downstairs. My mother was playing solitaire in the sitting room and my father

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reading the newspaper. I brought my two suitcases to the front door.

“I am going,” I said. “Goodbye.”

They both sat upright, their eyes fierce, intent.

“Where?” they demanded.

“Away. I am going to London. With Massimo.”

They stared at me, expressionless, stunned, shocked. Then my father’s face turned red.

“You will not! You are forbidden!”

“Yes, I am going away,” I repeated.

My mother had a pleading, anguished look in her eyes. “Sofia, darling, please ... we told you Massimo is not ... he’s not ...”

“I don’t care what you told me,” I shot back. “Massimo is my future.”

My father picked up a small marble statue on the table next to his chair and threw it at me. It crashed against the wall behind me and shattered into a thousand pieces.

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My mother was terrified, speechless. I hurried to the door, opened it, took my two suitcases and left.

My heart told me I was doing what I had to do. But was my life also about to shatter into a thousand pieces?

Chapter 2 – Gambling

The number 13 always tormented my mother, superstitious as she was, her life always careening, she thought, from bad to good to bad luck. Numbers she considered bad or good were part of her everyday life. To ward off the bad luck, she once had a bracelet made with the number 13 engraved in the metal but it didn't work. But there was no end to her bad luck. She switched to a ring with an opal, thinking somehow that this would be the magic stone. But nothing changed.

The sad truth was that she was, in fact, a very fortunate woman. From lowly circumstances, one of five daughters born and raised in Sicily, she was wed to a member of a prosperous, respected industrialist family with factories throughout the north of Italy. When she entered a shop, she always announced herself "I am Mrs. _____." When she attended an opera or a play, it was only to show off a new hat or fur. Her life was one of luxury and indulgence, but her heart was small and sour. There was little room for joy there.

She spent every Friday the 13th in bed.

The 13th is the date of my birth, but I am not superstitious at all. I don't believe in good luck or bad luck. I believe

simply that what is before every person is a lifetime of choices to make and chances to take.

Sometimes my brother Luigi and I went with our parents to a casino. When we were too young to be admitted, we spent the evening dancing at the cabaret downstairs. But later, when we were older, father gave us each a sum of money to play.

“Remember, you don’t always win,” he told us. “You might *never* win, so play for the excitement, not for winning.” I did not know then that he was trying to help us.

I saw film stars and producers playing for millions, some laughing and shouting. To them, it was just a pile of chips, a moment of sport. I saw others playing with looks of fierce concentration, sometimes of worry and fear. I knew then that the others were playing not for the excitement of winning, but for the fear of losing. They were playing for their lives.

I played, and I won, and felt the rush of anxiety, excitement—it was like a fever. Then I played more, and I lost, and felt myself crash to earth. Such strong emotions. These were not “gaming tables,” they were tables where souls were tested to their limits.

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I never gambled again in my life—at least, not at a table.

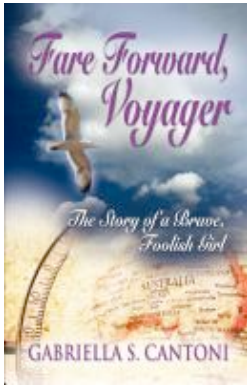
Though there were visits to the casino, the environment I grew up in was very conservative. There were routines and rules—when to eat and what, when to study, when to rest, times to practice music, times for sleep and for rising from sleep. None of these took into account what I or my brother Luigi wanted. They were the rules and they had to be followed.

I could have been swallowed up by the regularity, the monotony, the quiet absence of spontaneity. I could have become hypnotized by the never-changing rhythm of our lives, an automaton. I was quiet, shy—but curious, interested, hungry for the new. It was difficult in a house with so many rules, a house that allowed only a single newspaper to enter from the outside world. I turned to the only other source of information and ideas—my library. I learned much more from my books.

When I turned eighteen, I told my parents that I wanted, more than anything, to go to medical school. I felt in my heart that this would give me the challenges absent from my daily life, let me go out into the world and not only experience it, but try to make it a better place.

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My parents simply forbade me, with no explanation other than “the rule” was that Luigi and I were to go to London to learn English.



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