

## “A Breath of Freedom”

The very first thing that I remember from my great harrowing adventure is the smell of the crisp ocean. I remember the violent unforgiving sounds of the waves crashing against the overcrowded ship. I recall all of the sorrowful, the fearful, and the hopeful faces of the other passengers that traveled with me on that long and uncertain journey. Days became weeks and weeks became months but my resolve would not cease. I saw all of the old patched up luggage the passengers chose to bring with them. The dusty stained worn rags everyone wore were indicative of their lowly backgrounds. I didn't much care for those I was traveling beside because all I could think about was just how much I wanted to see my family again. I never had much in my life in Italy. Everything I did have I earned with incredibly hard work and unswerving determination. It was exhausting always having to fight for everything I wanted out of life but I felt that I had become stronger because of that.

A parade of words forever marched in my clouded mind during my arduous voyage. “You must join us here soon, Sofia!” My father would persistently write letter after heartbreaking letter for me to come visit him and my adoring mother. Life was just too hard in my small village of Trento. Loneliness consumed me as I ached to be with my family again. Money also was very scarce for me. My parents would come first, they told me, and I would follow years later when they were settled and comfortably making wages they could live off of. This wonderful place, they told me, where opportunities were as plentiful as the dreams we dared having would be the perfect place to start over. I could even start my own family and begin anew. Oh, what a magnificent prospect!

The passengers and I finally made it to this great new land in late December of 1894. The relentless winter snow continued billowing mercilessly against my shoulders as the brisk harsh winds that had gathered from the ocean further compromised my already overly chilled cheeks. All of the passengers huddled together for warmth as we were sent off the ship and into this small piece of land that appeared to be an island. The first thing I saw as the ship docked was this illuminatingly beautiful female figure standing tall as she embraced a book in one hand. The figure was proudly raising what appeared to be a torch in the other hand. It was simply the most incandescent vision I had ever witnessed in my short twenty years of life. When I was finally able to take my eyes off of the statue I noticed that there were numerous strange men in uniforms escorting everyone into this establishment. I was so nervous that I tripped coming off the boat and fortunately one of the seaman graciously caught me and lifted me upright.

“Maybe I made a mistake,” I thought to myself more than once that day. What was I doing

here? I didn't know anyone here. The strange uniformed gentlemen were constantly looking at me with those severe and accusatory eyes. I was feeling quite ill by the end of the journey. My head felt warm and my stomach was not as strong as it should have been. I looked around and asked for help but much to my dismay the never-ending sea of faces that I forced my eyes to focus upon spoke in words that were unfamiliar to me. No single individual spoke the same speech as I was accustomed to. "This was definitely a mistake," I felt as panic began to seethe in my veins. Darkness began to overcome me as I began to tumble to the ground. I watched the entire group of individuals pass me by as my body momentarily stood in suspended animation before claiming my place on the ground. The uniformed guards frantically came to my aid and rushed me to the infirmary that was located in this building. Heartbroken, I remember lying down for what appeared to be hours thinking I came all of this way and I was never going to see my family again. Tired, aching, and sickened from the painfully long trip I succumbed to my frustrations and began to cry. An intense wailing sound overcame my body to a point where it felt like those sounds couldn't have possibly been coming from my own body but alas they were. Hopeless, I closed my eyes and drifted away in hopes of waking up to the realization of having imagined all of this absurdity. I may have not been able to see my family again but at least I would have been in the comfort of my homeland.

Distant cries could be heard from down the hallway where I had been sleeping. The words, "Mia Bambina! Mia Bambina! Mia Bambina," were shouted repeatedly in a voice so haunting that sent chills down my spine. I woke up in a startle finally registering the familiar words. "I must be dreaming," I thought to myself. It dawned on me that those reiterated words were spoken by my very own mother. Relief overcame my body as I nearly lost balance while sliding off the infirmary bed. My mother's choking sobs could be heard from miles away that is how loud she was screaming for her only daughter. I turned around and found my father and mother waiting for me down the narrowed hallway. I ran out to greet them and gave them the greatest and most loving embrace that I have dreamt of giving my parents for three agonizingly long years. I never thought that moment would ever come. We stood there for what seemed like an eternity reacquainting and just savoring the memories that will be engrained in our hearts for numerous years to come.

My parents had found a home in Brooklyn, N.Y. My father was a humble businessman and worked as a shoe repairman. My mother worked in a small factory and was proud of the work that she had done. It took me a year to familiarize myself with the once foreign land but became quickly enamored by all the rich and wonderful cultures engrained in the country.

I was given the chance to go to the university to learn. It took some getting used to especially with my distinctive Italian accent but I was able to manage in due time. One Monday morning I remember walking to class when the sound of my name was being called from a distance "Sofia!" I turned around but didn't see anyone so I kept walking down the pathways to get to my next class. "Sofia!" I heard my name being called again and stopped this time. It was Colin, an Irish-American immigrant that I had met in University. He was not a student there but did repairs for the school whenever there was a need. He started talking to me one day and we became fast friends. It was difficult at first with his heavy Irish brogue and my equally heavy Italian accent. We were able to find a way to communicate with each other because as they say smiles are the same no matter what language one speaks.

"You know I've known you for three years now, Sofia?" Colin always wore his heart on his sleeve. The contrast of his dark hair, vibrant blue eyes and pale skin made his pink laden cheeks obvious that he was shy and timid when it came to talking to me.

"Oh, has it been that long already," I coyly giggle as I begin walking away.

"Please wait, Sof," He gently held my arm and spun me around with the greatest of care.

"This isn't easy for me so I'm just going to go about and say it. I love you Sofia. You are my best friend and I would like very much if you'd marry me and be my wife."

Stunned I looked at him with a smile, "Colin, of course I'll marry you." It was an easy decision to make. I knew Colin loved me and I loved him just as fiercely back.

Colin and I were married two years later and we had two children together. This country has given me so many wonderful opportunities. It gave me the freedom to be the person I chose to become, the opportunities to make something I can be proud of and most importantly it made my parents happy to be with them again. I could not even recall how many tear filled nights I begged and prayed and pleaded for just one more chance to see my mother and father smile for me just one more time. The chance to sail to America gave me that chance. It is a moment that I held dear in my heart for the remaining years of my life. This first breath of freedom was not lost on me. I made sure that when I had a family of my own they would know my struggles and I would tell them the day I reunited with my family and started a brand new life for myself. This country became my own. I love this land. The opportunity to sail here and begin again was the greatest gift I would ever receive.