

EUGENE MIRABELLI

*The Only Known
Jump Across Time*

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Across Time

ENZO AUGUSTO CAPELLINO — ENZO THE TAILOR, the same Enzo who helped Aldo Vela stretch fabric over his aeroplane frames, that Enzo — invented something even more astonishing than a flying machine. It was used only once, and that was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in May of 1928. All this happened because of Lydia Webster Chase — shy, tall, beautiful Lydia.

Lydia Chase was the daughter of Prescott Chase, a retired professor of botany at Harvard University. Enzo and Lydia knew of each other only because her father had his shirts and suits made in Capellino's shop. One day in 1908, while being fitted for a summer-weight linen suit jacket, Professor Chase happened to make small talk about gardening. Now, young Enzo Capellino was an avid gardener and he invited the professor to walk through the sunny patch he cultivated behind his shop. Old Professor Chase was delighted by this tangled paradise of Sicilian fruit trees, grapevines and vegetables, and in return he invited Mr Capellino to visit his garden, a half-acre of flower beds, cool moss and ferns and fish pools, gravel walks and willow trees which lay behind his large square house on Kirkland Street.

In the years that followed, the elderly professor and the young tailor visited each other's gardens once

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every June, exchanging seeds and cuttings. A certain decorum clothed these visits, partly because Professor Chase had been taught to treat social inferiors with polite formality and partly because Mr Capellino had been taught to show deference to his elders, and the professor was clearly a generation older.

In May of 1927 the professor's daughter, Lydia Chase, visited the tailor's shop for the first time, bringing with her the measurements for her father's summer shirts. Enzo looked up from his cutting table that day and saw a tall, slender woman dressed in white, a beautiful woman with a distracted look about her. She moved with an elegant awkwardness, as if — as if — as if, he thought, she were a largewinged crane or snowy egret, a creature who would be superbly graceful the moment she took flight, for air would be her natural element, not earth. Enzo himself was so distracted by her that it was not until after she left that he looked at the measurements she had given him. He saw that they were much shrunken from a year ago.

Miss Chase returned to Mr Capellino's shop a few weeks later to pick up the shirts. Enzo understood from the terribly diminished measurements that the professor, her father, was very sick. He wanted to solace Miss Chase, who was clearly even more distracted than before, but found that all he could say was, "I hope Professor Chase is well." To which Lydia replied, "Thank you." She flushed slightly, hesitated as if to say something more, then turned and left the shop, bumping ever so slightly into the door on her way out.



Prescott Chase, Harvard Professor Emeritus of botany, veteran of the Civil War, died in December of 1927 at the age of eighty-four and was buried next to

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his wife and son in Mount Auburn Cemetery. Prescott's old friends had already died or were ailing and house-bound, and Christ Church, though small, looked quite empty. Lydia's women friends attended the service, as did five of the professor's former students and the President of the Charles Downing Horticulture Society. After the service, as Lydia followed the coffin past the empty pews, she noticed a solitary man standing halfway to the back of the church. He was of medium height, or somewhat shorter, and he was gazing at her with enormously sad, sympathetic eyes. It was not until she was home and had closed the door behind her that Lydia remembered him as the tailor, Mr Capellino, upon which she suddenly burst into tears.

Lydia's friends visited her regularly that December, but by the last week of January, 1928, the only visitor she had was a librarian from Harvard who had asked to examine her father's books and papers to see if there was anything valuable she could give to the university. She was lonely.

The figure of Mr Capellino refused to abandon Lydia's memory, so in February she visited his shop. He was even shorter and darker than she had recalled, and the shop more cluttered. But when he stepped forward to greet her he smiled, his face lighting up so much at the sight of her that she forgot what she had planned to say and fumbled with pleasantries about the weather. As for the weather, sleet and freezing rain had kept everyone else at home, so the shop was empty. Lydia recovered herself and said she hoped Mr Capellino could help her choose a necktie as a gift. Enzo explained that he had no neckties.

"No neckties?" she echoed, glancing about with a worried look.

"Please make yourself comfortable, Miss Chase,"

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he said. "I'll make tea."

Lydia sat in a chair beside the cutting table and removed her gloves. Enzo brought out a ceramic tea service whose brightly painted teapot was in the shape of a hen.

"My mother died many years ago and my father needed somebody, needed me, to take care of the house, take care of him and the house," Lydia blurted out, as if she had been asked.

"I understand," Enzo replied gently, pouring tea. "I was eighteen when my father died. I had to take over the shop to help my mother and to make dowries for my two younger sisters. My sisters married seventeen years ago, and my mother died three years ago, and here I am today."

Lydia nervously twisted her gloves in her lap and wondered what to say next. "You garden on summer evenings," she ventured.

"And I read on winter nights," Enzo said.

After a moment she asked, "Have you ever wished to escape time, Mr Capellino, so as to change your life?"

"Often," he said, looking up at her.

"Would you change things in the past or the future?"

"You cannot change the past, only the future," he said.

"Somebody should build a time machine to go to the future," Lydia said, smiling for the first time.

Enzo was enchanted by her smile. "I will do that," he told her.



One afternoon Enzo looked up from his jumbled cutting table and there was Lydia, standing tall in the middle of the shop. Snowflakes melting on her black

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cloche hat and on her long black coat gave her the appearance of — the appearance of — Yes! Enzo thought, the appearance of the night sky clothed with stars. She asked Mr Capellino for help in choosing a pair of gentleman's leather gloves. He explained that he didn't carry gloves. "No gloves?" Lydia said, looking about vaguely.

"No one will be coming here in this blizzard," Enzo said, quickly bringing out a painted coffee pot shaped like a rooster. "Please make yourself comfortable."

He was pouring coffee from the brightly colored pot when Lydia asked him, "Have you thought about the time machine?"

"I've thought about it for years."

"How would it work?" she asked.

"Einstein has written about the fabric of space-time," he began.

"Einstein? The fabric of space-time?"

Enzo set down the pot. "Those are his words, yes. And I wondered about this fabric. He said it was curved, and I know something about fitting pieces of flat fabric over a curved surface. And as I thought about it, evening after evening, I came to see that the past is like a tightly woven bolt of cloth, endlessly wide and endlessly long and endlessly deep."

"And the future?"

"The future is being woven in this passing instant, right now. When we say *now* we refer to the edge where the threads are being brought together. A time machine will permit us to get just ahead, just a wee bit ahead, just a thread's breadth ahead of now. And once there, we can weave life any whichway we want, to please ourselves." He had never felt so confident and he broke into a smile.

Lydia had discovered she deeply enjoyed talking

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this kind of nonsense with Mr Capellino. "And what would it take to leap the distance of one thread ahead of now?" she asked with a smile.

"A lightning bolt," he said, laughing for the delight he saw in her face.

Lydia stayed talking with Enzo rather longer than the last visit and enjoyed herself more than she had in a long time.

The next time Lydia and Enzo met, a gust of wind blew Lydia's umbrella inside out just as she came in the door. She was gasping for breath and her face was drenched with rain. Enzo produced a dazzling white handkerchief and dabbed gently at her cheeks, but after three dabs the couple became embarrassed at how close they were to each other. Abruptly Enzo busied himself in fixing her umbrella while Lydia composed herself. She asked did he have any books, and Enzo laughed and answered no, no books, only men's clothing.

"The man who came from Harvard is cataloging my father's library and putting *all* the books in order," she said, looking around as if seeing the shop for the first time. "He's very good at making things neat and orderly. Perhaps you could use —"

But Enzo interrupted to tell her, "They are like diamonds in your hair, those raindrops." That was the first time he had ever said anything like that, and he

was as surprised as Lydia by his boldness. He went off and returned with a tray and two glasses. "A little sweet wine from before Prohibition," he explained.

Lydia sipped from her glass, coughed and put her hand to her chest as the wine went down. "How would one get a lightning bolt?" she asked.

"I'll make one."

"Is that possible?"

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“Yes, certainly. Before my parents immigrated to this country they lived in Palermo and saw Augusto Righi demonstrate his lightning machine at the University. My father was very impressed by Righi. He saw the demonstration twice and told me about it many times. My middle name, Augusto, is after Augusto Righi.”

“The machine made lightning bolts?” Lydia asked, beginning to smile.

“Little lightning bolts, yes. Or, as you might say, very large sparks.” Enzo, too, began to smile.

“How would one make a time machine?”

“It’s the same as with making a suit. First I make the pattern, then I make the finished suit — or in this case, the machine.”

“But how does it work? I mean, how does lightning make the time machine possible?”

“The lightning bolt makes a tiny rip in the fabric of space-time, in the precise present, in the now. And if you are right there when it happens, as close as you can get, you will suddenly find yourself on the frayed edge of the fabric of space-time. It stands to reason.”

Lydia felt unreasonably happy. “When the time is right, I would like very much to see your machine.”

“I’ll invite you.”

Lydia stayed and talked with Enzo until he closed the shop and then she walked home, reflecting on all the turns their conversation had taken.



Augusto Righi (1850-1921) is probably best known for his study of electromagnetic oscillations. His principle teaching post was at the University of Bologna, but he also taught at the University of Palermo in the years 1880-1885. The machine which Enzo Capellino’s father saw Righi demonstrate was most likely the one

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designed by Righi to accumulate weak electric charges. Essentially, the apparatus consisted of a rubber belt looped between two metal pulleys set one above the other, and at the upper end of the loop the belt traveled through a small opening into a hollow copper sphere, leaving its electric charge there. In theory, there is no limit to the voltage which can be accumulated on the sphere. Probably the earliest precursor of Righi's apparatus was a device built by Walckiers de St. Amand in France in 1784. His machine was simply a silken belt stretched between two rollers, so that when you turned the rollers the silk moved, rubbing against small cushions positioned at the rollers, thereby accumulating an electric charge.

Enzo had long known that if he brushed his hand across certain materials, such as fur or wool or silk, an electric charge accumulated, so that if he then reached for a piece of metal a spark would jump from his finger to the metal, giving him a tiny shock. In his tailor shop he had noticed that he was able to get a particularly large spark by drawing wool cloth across the brass yardstick which formed the end of his cutting table, so he planned a machine with a broad continuous belt of thick wool looped tightly between two brass rollers and, of course, at one end there would be a large hollow copper sphere, pierced with a hole so that one of the rollers could be fixed inside.



The sky was blue and the air warm when Lydia next visited the tailor's shop. The clothing dummy in the window — the top half of a cheerful man who had worn a Harris tweed jacket all winter — now wore a white jacket with bright azure stripes; furthermore, he had a straw boater on his head and his stiff hands were hold-

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ing a cardboard sign (*On Vacation! Will return in future.*) The door was unlocked, so Lydia walked through the shop and out to the garden where Enzo, in his shirt sleeves, was bent over a gleaming brass roller at least a yard long. His back was toward her, so she called out, "Mr Capellino, hello." He straightened up and turned around, smiling. "You make my name sound so beautiful," he said. "Please call me Enzo."

"And you may call me Lydia, if you wish," she replied.

"Lydia, I'll get us something cool to drink." He dashed up a rickety flight of outdoor stairs and entered the floor above the shop. Lydia looked around at the curved sheets of metal which lay here and there, and at the tangled garden which was just beginning to come into blossom. Enzo returned with a painted tray bearing a bottle and two glasses half filled with ice.

"You are actually building an actual time machine," Lydia said, clearly surprised.

"Actually, yes." He poured something as dark as coffee from the bottle into one of the glasses and handed it to her.

"Now, I hope you will accept this," Lydia said, handing him a large flat parcel. While Enzo unfolded the wrapping paper, she told him, "The librarian from Harvard says that the bookcase behind my father's desk has a number of valuable books about botany and horticulture. Dwight — he's the librarian — knows about these things, about how valuable the books are. Right down to the penny. He said somebody might steal one of the volumes and he wants me to donate them to Harvard for permanent safekeeping. He's not interested in this one and he let me take it from the house. It's my father's garden diary, all about the flowers in back of our house. Twenty years of notes and drawings."

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Enzo gently opened the worn volume. "This is wonderful, truly wonderful," he murmured. "It's a treasure, a treasure," he said, tenderly turning the pages. "I appreciate your thinking of me," — he was pressing the notebook to his chest as he said this — "but this valuable journal should remain in your family, in your hands," he said, giving it back to her. "Your father was a great botanist. He loved his plants almost as much as he loved you."

Lydia's eyes glistened and there was an awkward silence. Enzo raised his glass. "To you," he said cheerfully and he drank.

Lydia raised her glass. "To you," she echoed. The beverage was like liquid fire and not sweet. "Well!" she said, gasping from the drink. "Well, well, well. Please tell me about your machine."

Enzo described how he was building a hollow metal tube which would be about four feet in diameter and stand about twenty feet tall. Inside, at the bottom of the tube, was a brass roller driven by an electric motor. A broad belt of wool ran from the bottom roller, up the tube and over another brass roller, then down the tube to the bottom roller again. And at the top of the tube there would be a great hollow metal sphere to gather the electric charges which would fly from the cloth, he explained. "That's the hard part," he added.

"The electric charges?"

"No. The hard part is getting the sphere to rest just right at the top of the tube. It's already fallen down twice. I think I've misplaced some pieces."

"It's best to keep everything in its place, because then there's a place for everything. That's what Dwight says."

"Oh, yes. Dwight," murmured Enzo. "Would you like a little more wine?"

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“Is it legal to drink this?”

“Oh, yes. My father made this many, many years ago. Before Prohibition. He loved to make wine. Shall I refill your glass?”

Lydia, began to laugh — a remarkably rich musical laugh. “Ah, Enzo, please, do,” she said, holding out her glass. She was, Enzo realized, just the slightest bit drunk. The days were getting longer and they enjoyed each other’s company until twilight when Lydia said goodbye.



Under the hot sun Enzo had stripped to the waist and was working on the starter switch of the time machine when Lydia walked into the garden. “Hello, Enzo,” she said. “I received your invitation and here I am.” The 1920s fashion for women was all flatness and no curves, which struck Enzo as comically wrong, yet as she came walking in her sleeveless dress, one hand swinging the long strand of large green beads she wore around her neck, she was the most desirable woman in the world. As for Lydia, she wondered why she was there, saying hello to this short bronze man whose shoulders glistened with sweat and whose thick chest hair — well, Enzo had already snatched up his shirt and was buttoning it while she took in the great time machine. It stood erect in the center of the small garden, a thick twenty-foot column topped by a sphere which had been beautifully proportioned to the shaft but, as Enzo explained to Lydia, it had fallen a few times and was now somewhat reshaped. Indeed, it resembled a blunt arrowhead pointing skyward. “What do you think?” Enzo asked her.

Lydia shaded her eyes with her hand and gazed up at his apparatus. “It reminds me of something. I can’t

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think what. It's rather like — Oh! — It does look rather like a, or like the —" Lydia hesitated, searching for the proper term. "Yes, like a stamen, the stamen of a great flower."

Enzo stood beside her, also looking up at it. "Ah, I had not thought of that," Enzo said slowly. "But, yes, I suppose it does."

"And it will make lightning?" she asked him.

"Yes, at the top. I'm sure of that."

"And the lightning will tear the fabric of space time, make a little rip in it?"

"Yes, I'm sure of that, too."

"And you'll be able to leap forward into next year or the year after that?"

"Ah," Enzo sat down on a small garden bench.

"I'm not so sure of that. I've been working without sleep for the past five days. But I hope so." Indeed, he did look tired.

"I hope so, too," Lydia said.

"I'll get us a cool drink," Enzo said. He went up the wobbly flight of outdoor stairs and into his rooms above the shop and came back down with a basket of ice which cradled two large bottles of wine and two glasses. The day was warm and there was an uncertain breeze that blew strongly one moment and vanished the next, leaving only a dry stillness. Lydia sat on a cast-iron garden chair and Enzo sat on the small wood bench and they drifted in a long winding conversation as they drank the cool wine.

Lydia asked him about the metalwork at the top of the outdoor stairway. "It looks like a big bird cage," she said.

"Ah, that's a protective cage," Enzo said. "After starting the machine, I'll go up those stairs and get inside it. At that height I'll be level with the top of the lightning

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machine and close to it, but the lattice of metal will protect me from being hit.”

Lydia looked worried. “Are you sure you’ll be safe? Won’t you be electrocuted?”

Enzo smiled. “I’ll be safe. My only worry is that the rip in the fabric of space-time won’t be big enough for me to slip through.”

Lydia looked at the metal column with its banged up arrow-head crown. “How strange,” she said reflectively. “Here you are on an ordinary Monday afternoon. You’re about to leap forward in time, and no one knows.”

“You’re here and that’s the world to me. Now it’s time I tested it.” Enzo strode to the machine and pressed the starter button. The motor began turning the brass roller so the great wool belt began to move, rising up inside the tall metal cylinder, passing over the roller inside the metal sphere and down again. Little by little the speed of the rollers increased, the belt blurred and the air was filled with a humming rattle. Enzo drank off the last of his wine, tossed the glass over his shoulder — he discovered that he could make these bold gestures with complete confidence so long as Lydia was nearby — and mounted the trembling stairway to the lattice cage. He stepped into the cage and looked down to the garden to discover that Lydia’s chair was empty. She was running up the stairs. She called to him, but the humming of the machine had grown louder.

“The librarian is going to ask me to marry him,” she said. “I don’t know what to do. I haven’t been able to sleep for days.”

“I can’t hear you,” cried Enzo from inside the cage, plainly shocked at what he had heard.

“He wrote me a letter last week, saying he was going to ask me this evening.”

“The librarian!”

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“Yes, Dwight has a schedule and this evening he’s going to ask me to marry him. What do you think —”

“I think he’s an unpronounceable clump of consonants,” Enzo shouted over the growing thunder of the machine.

“Dwight says the future is known to people who make schedules.”

“Will you marry a man who has a place for everything and everything in its place? A time for everything and everything in its time?”

“I’m forty-one years old and no one has ever proposed marriage to me,” she said, lifting her voice against the crackle of sparks.

“I’m forty-three and have never dared propose marriage to anyone. I’ve achieved nothing!”

A bluish glow hovered over the row of phonograph needles which were fixed a hairsbreadth from the flying surface of the belt and long thread-like sparks began to flare from the bent edges of the sphere atop the machine.

*“You have made this wonderful machine,” she cried.
“But it may work no better than I have!”*

Enzo threw open the lattice door and started out to meet her just as Lydia started in, the two clutching each other as the first lightning bolt unfurled and snapped overhead like a colossal whip. The hair on Enzo’s chest burst into flame, scorching Lydia’s breasts. The world overflowed with light as every nail and rivet, every garden tool, the cast iron garden chair and even the garden itself surged toward them, all the while flaring apart, coming undone. “Yes!” Lydia thought — or maybe she actually cried aloud — “Yes! We’re at the front edge of *now* and these are the raveled threads of space-time.” And everything melted like a meteor into the rising dark.



When Enzo opened his eyes he was flat on his back in the garden. He realized that his arms were around Lydia, her arms over his shoulders and her eyes closed in sleep. The collapsed remnants of the lattice cage lay upon them like a shredded blanket. Lydia opened her eyes and sat up. She looked at the blue sky, glanced down at her singed dress and the string of melted beads, then looked at Enzo. "We're alive and it's a beautiful day," she said. "Yes," said Enzo, looking at his pocket watch whose fused hands said three o'clock. "And I wonder which day it is." They went through the shop and out the front door to the street to ask the first passerby what day it was and what time of day. It was three in the afternoon on Tuesday, May 22, 1928, precisely twenty-four hours forward from where they had been. "You've worked wonders, Enzo. We've jumped a day ahead and we're free to make whatever we want of our time."

"I propose marriage," he said, smiling up at her.

"I accept," she said, returning his smile.

Then they set off to get dinner, because they both felt wonderfully hungry, quite famished in fact, as if they had been asleep and had not eaten for a whole day.



In June of 1928 a man buying a seersucker jacket asked Enzo what the equipment in the back yard was for. When Enzo told him that it was a machine for generating lightning bolts, the man became extraordinarily interested and asked so many questions that Enzo, in a burst of confidence, began to tell him about the fabric of space-time, upon which the man gave a short

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laugh and said the tailor didn't know what he was talking about.

In 1929, a year after Enzo and Lydia had made their jump forward in time, Robert Van de Graaff built a small electrostatic generator at Princeton University, capable of producing around eighty thousand volts. At the inaugural dinner of the American Institute of Physics, he demonstrated an improved version of the same apparatus. It resembled in all essentials the very much larger and more powerful machine which had stood behind Capellino's shop three years earlier. In 1931 Van de Graaff joined the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and began assembling a double generator composed of two twenty-three foot high columns each containing two belts and supporting an aluminum sphere six feet in diameter. This machine, capable of generating 50 million electron volts, was housed in its own building at MIT and, after some changes, was used as an atom smasher. In the 1950s MIT donated it to the Boston Museum of Science and in 1980 the Museum installed it in the Thomson Theatre of Electricity where it currently produces spectacular demonstrations of man-made lightning.



Enzo and Lydia were married on Saturday, June 23, 1928, and their daughter, Abigail Santuzza Capellino, was born in autumn of the following year. They lived in the large square house on Kirkland Street, and Enzo continued to work as a tailor for some months, then sold his shop in order to devote himself to the extensive Chase gardens which were succumbing to overgrowth and weeds. Old Professor Chase's collection of works by Charles Downing led Enzo and Lydia to an interest in pomology, and they became quite expert in

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that field, publishing a number of papers on apple species of New England and New York.

Although they wrote for scholarly horticultural journals and for garden club magazines, neither Enzo nor Lydia ever published anything about their time transit. They remained silent about the event partly because they enjoyed their privacy, and partly because they came to know how dangerous the experiment had been. They were lucky to have awakened with nothing worse than hunger pangs, as if they had merely been asleep for a day, but they feared some other experimenter might not survive. Despite the protective metal latticework, technically known as a Faraday cage, the couple were fortunate not to have been electrocuted — much as Ben Franklin, flying his kite into an electrical storm, had been fortunate. Lydia and Enzo enjoyed taking their grandchildren to the Museum of Science in Boston to witness the lightning bolts thrown off by the electrostatic machine there, and a lightning flash during a summer storm always remained a happy sight for the couple. Enzo Augusto Capellino (1885-1970) and Lydia Prescott Capellino (1887-1971) escaped time for a day.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

EUGENE (Gene) MIRABELLI was born in 1931 and for close to seventy years he has written novels, short stories, journalism and reviews, and for more than half that time he also taught literature and writing at a university. His publications include nine novels. “The Only Known Jump Across Time” appears in his forthcoming triptych novel, *Renato!*, to be published in October 2020. It won a coveted (and rare) bronze Eloi medal after it was first published as a stand-alone tale in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

Renato! is Mirabelli’s masterpiece, a three-part work comprised of interlocking novels published over the last dozen years: *The Goddess in Love with a Horse*; *Renato, the Painter*; and *Renato After Alba*. The first is a series of cascading tales stretching from the 19th century in Sicily into the 20th century in Boston, and providing a genealogy of the extended Cavallù family, men and women who were “known for being handsome, quick-witted and rash” and who fill the pages of most of Mirabelli’s other works.

Renato! [*forthcoming*]

Renato, the Painter, <https://tinyurl.com/ybkxb4xf>

Renato After Alba, <https://tinyurl.com/yawdd3h5>