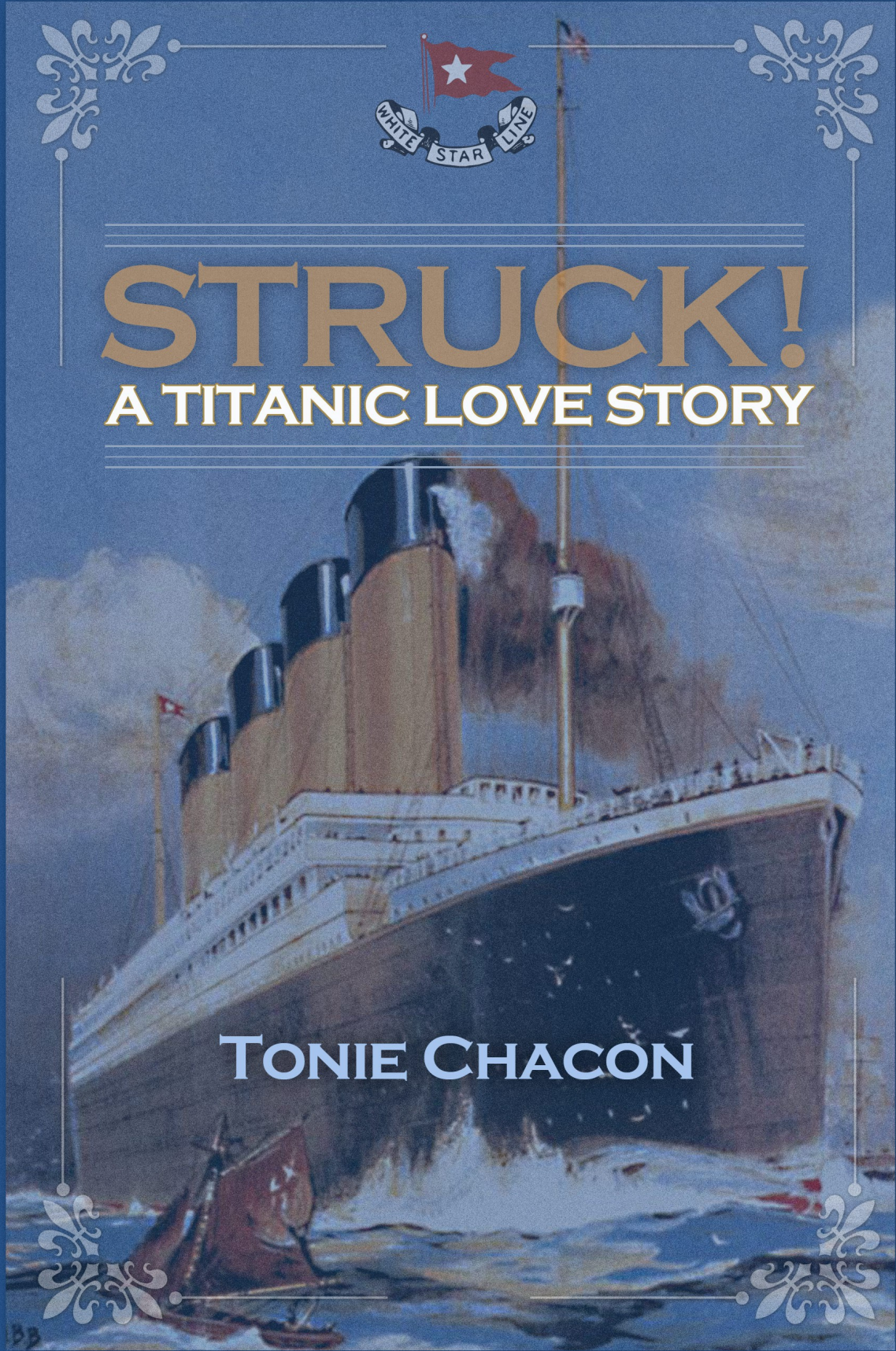




# STRUCK!

## A TITANIC LOVE STORY

TONIE CHACON



# ***Struck! A Titanic Love Story***

by

**Tonie Chacon**

***Yellow Rose***  
***by Regal Crest***  
**Texas**

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## **Author's Notes**

The ship sank. That much is true, and so are most of the other historical details mentioned in the book. But this is a work of fiction, and it is a love story. It is also a tragedy, as we all know. Some poetic license was taken here and there, for the benefit of love. This is not meant, in any way, to detract from the seriousness of the disaster. You won't find a record of lesbians on the *Titanic* in the history books, but we all know they were there. This is one of their stories.

## **Dedication**

For Kate:  
My wife, my love, my life. Anything is possible  
with you by my side.



# Chapter One

## 04 April 1912 — Southampton

THE *R.M.S. TITANIC* sat at the pier in Southampton in front of Megan Mahoney's window at the counter of the White Star Line. She could also see it from the doors of the baggage room and again from the end of the long passageway to the end of the building and beyond. The ship towered over the town. She blocked the sun. It was no wonder they named her *Titanic*.

"I would give just about anything to be able to get on that ship and sail into the sunset," Megan sighed. She knew she should be satisfied with her lot. She was lucky to have a job at all, being a woman. Her uncle had given her a start at the White Star Line. Five years into the job now, she'd finally made her way up to apprentice ticket clerk, but she was beginning to feel the strain on her private life. Da kept saying she needed to be done and come home. She was already an old maid in some people's minds, and only had a month before Molly's wedding to try and figure things out.

Megan watched the comings and goings of the crew. Cranes operated in syncopation, loading the giant nets of trunks, boxes, suitcases, and duffel bags onto the deck. She wondered how much of the cargo in those sacks was mail? It was a Royal Mail Ship, after all.

What could be in all those boxes? Treasures to be bought and sold, spices from an exotic country, fine art from Sicily? All sorts of items filled Megan's imagination. Take me away from here, won't you, *Titanic*? To the Americas to start a new life, where there were no more responsibilities except the ones she created. It wasn't that she didn't like working. She did. She just didn't want to have to quit and return home to fare for the family. But what else was there? Megan looked back to the ship.

"Oh, the possibilities," she said. She brought her hand to her lips. She should get back to her desk. She needed to do some more studying of the ship's diagrams in order to help customers find their cabins. Maybe a few more patrons would come in and she could help them. It would give her a bit more practice, and she could stand at the front counter and stare at the giant ship outside the window. There was something about that ship, *Titanic*, that seemed to pull at her soul.

Da wanted her to find a husband and settle down, but how was she supposed to meet someone new when she'd already met every person within a ten-mile radius? Here she was, twenty-six years old and still without a spark. She would love to have a house and home with her own person to care for, but she couldn't bear to do that strapped to her father's kitchen. The threat had hung over her head ever since Molly, her sister, announced that she was getting married next month. Megan had been thrilled at first. She hadn't even thought of the consequences those few words would have on her own life. The threat was coming closer and closer as the wedding date neared.

Maybe she was doing it wrong. She wasn't sure exactly what flirting was, but she must try. She thought her looks were good enough. She was strong and healthy. She possessed the red hair of her mother and the freckles on her nose from her father and his ease to take the sun, unlike so

many other gingers. She had no idea where her nose had come from, but thanked the Lord she didn't get Da's.

The front door bell jangled and a man walked into the office. Megan returned to her desk at the far corner away from the gated window. From there, she could observe her boss, Cecil McFadden, handling the customer, which was part of her training. So many good things she got to hear and see. Lots of rich folk and families from everywhere came in to buy tickets. She sat on her stool and began the daunting chore of putting together all the forms to be mailed to the passengers before they sailed. There were boarding passes, luggage tags for deep storage, tags for stateroom usage, as well as immigration papers to be sorted.

The man was still standing at the counter. Did he ring the bell? She couldn't remember hearing it, but it rang so often, she sometimes didn't hear it. Where was Cecil? She knew he enjoyed letting customers stand at the window for just a bit longer than they liked before finally wandering over to help them, but this was too much. She couldn't stand it anymore. She got up and hurried over to help the gentleman.

"Hello sir, what can I help you with?" Megan asked in her most professional voice.

"I wish to return this ticket I purchased to board that grand ship, *Titanic*. My wife, she says, she will not go. I ask her why? I spend my hard earned wages so we could have a new opportunity, but she says no, she no go. She no go, I no go." A heavy French accent added to his voice. "Can you give me back my money so my family will stay together?" The man stood back with his flimsy beret held to his stomach, rolling it and unrolling it.

Damn. She didn't know how to take a return. "Um, well, I don't have the experience of doing a refund, but let me get someone who can and I'll watch and we both will benefit. Just a minute, please." Megan turned to call out to Cecil. "Ah, Mr. McFadden, could you come over here and assist this gentleman with a refund, please?"

Cecil sighed. His chair creaked, steps sounded, and he finally came around the corner of his doorway and slowly walked to the counter. He had been losing some hair each year she'd known him. In five years his hairline thinned around his ears and slightly down the back. He was a little more roly-poly these days, too. "How can I help you?" Cecil asked.

He looked over the ticket the man had set down.

"I wish a refund, please," the gentleman replied.

"Well now, let's see what we can do for you, chap. It says here you were to travel on *Titanic*, leaving on the tenth of April of this fine year of nineteen hundred and twelve. Is that correct?"

"Yes sir."

"Where are the other documents we had sent to you through the Royal Mail Service? You did receive them, correct?"

"Yes, well, sir, I did receive them, that is how my wife found out about my big surprise for a new life. So much for a surprise," he said. "She threw them all in the fireplace. I watched them burn myself. So, I was wondering, if I could please, sir, return my ticket for all of us and get back the good money I spent trying to get a better life for my family so my wife will get off my back?" He crumpled his hat.

"The documents were destroyed? I see." Cecil scratched his beard. "Now you say you saw the documents burn up in the fireplace, correct? You mean all of them? The whole packet you say? Well, it's not exactly protocol. But you saw them burn?" He looked at the gentleman closely.

"I did, sir, right into ashes. There was nothing left by the time she was done with them."

“I see by this date stamp that this ticket was purchased last month? How is it that you are just coming around now?”

“It was going to be a surprise. You know, just a little trip for the family. Then those damn documents arrived and then the fireplace scene and all.”

“All right then, everything seems to be in order. Here you go. Sign here.” Cecil pointed to a line on the refund form and handed the gentleman his money, counting back to the man out loud while handing him the bills. “I suppose, then, thank you for choosing the White Star Line for all your travel needs.”

The man took his bills and walked out the front door. Cecil recorded the transaction in the ledger and put the ticket on top of the burn stack for later disposal. He walked back into his office and sat down to proceed with what he was doing before. Megan could see him from where she stood at the window. It looked like he was doing nothing but reading the paper, but she knew he was really looking for opportunities to expand his world. He was always spouting off about his travels as a sea merchant in his earlier days. A sea merchant, huh? Probably a pirate more than likely.

She returned to her desk and grabbed more forms from one pile and added them to the stacks growing in front of her. Each mound got one of these immigration papers, and she'd be done with this chore. She had to straighten them up and put them away until they went into the envelopes to be mailed.

The day passed slowly. She waited on a few more customers while Cecil was at lunch. She enjoyed that. Some of the people were there to claim parcels from other countries, from America even. Being an apprentice, she had all sorts of different jobs that she did daily. Now that *Titanic* was anchored outside their door, she had more work than ever, gathering the mail and sorting packages to faraway lands. Megan liked to imagine what was in the packages, and she got into some interesting conversations with the customers. Other than that, the day was dull. Finally, she walked over to Cecil.

“Can I help you with anything else, Mr. McFadden?”

“It's almost quitting time, missy. How 'bout going out to the slash pile for the rest of the afternoon? 'Tis a nice day to burn.”

“All right, that sounds grand. I love the smell of wood burning. Makes me think of me Ma.”

Megan took the handful of discarded paper on the counter, and another from underneath, and put them in a wheelbarrow to take out back. She donned her shawl and wheeled the barrow through the double back doors. She turned left onto the path heading up to the slash pile.

Megan glanced skyward. The feathery clouds whipped around in the blue sky. Horse tails, her grandmother had called them. It was a glorious day, not too cold but with a briskness that hadn't left the air yet. She pushed the wheelbarrow up the path on the hill, which caused her legs to burn a bit. She made it to the top where there were trees all around and stopped at the fire ring. She tossed some branches and twigs in to start with. She struck a match against a brick and threw it onto the tender. A nice whoosh sounded from the wood. She waited a bit and stirred, added more slash and then started to toss in the papers from the office.

The first handful burned brightly in Megan's face. The warmth of the blaze was nice and toasty. She reached to grab another handful when she noticed the top page. It was that refunded ticket. She had wanted to look at it. She threw the other stuff in her hand into the fire, but her concentration was on that ticket. There was something funny about it. She didn't know what. She looked again. She started at the top of the page, read it through once, then once again and, wait a minute. It didn't have a big red VOID stamp on it. Ol' Cecil made a mistake. She should tell on

him. No, that wouldn't look good for her or him. He was a nice enough guy. She didn't want to get him in trouble. She should just take the ticket and use it for herself. Wouldn't that show them?

She could. No one would know but her and God. Megan glanced around, then up. Are you telling me to go?

It was so tempting. She had it right there in her hand, the one thing she had been dreaming about her whole life. It was a ticket out of there, to another world totally across the ocean. What should she do? To burn or not to burn? That was the question. Shakespeare, right? She had no time to ponder Shakespearian questions. She quickly folded up the ticket. She would think about it later. She had six more days before the ship sailed. That was enough time. It had to be.

She secured the ticket into her skirt's hidden pocket that only her mother knew about, because she had sewn it there herself. She told Megan to always keep a coin in that pocket so she would have fare to help out in a crisis. It was a good place for the ticket. Cecil wouldn't even think about it. He'd think it went up in smoke.

Keep working then. She grabbed another handful of slash and threw it onto the fire. Soon everything was burned to a flaky black crust, which she stirred around to get the last ashes to burn out. Satisfied that a wind would not pick up a still burning ember, she patted her pocket, turned the wheelbarrow around, and headed back into the office.

Lord, what had she done now? Nothing that she hadn't dreamed about for such a long time, and it all but fell into her lap. Could she do this? Was she jumping at this chance to change the dull life that seemed to have chosen her? Should she leap toward a new beginning and the world that had suddenly opened its arms and enveloped Megan into its bosom? Yes. To set sail on the most luxurious vessel in the entire world? Yes, yes, yes.

Megan fretted through the rest of her time at work. Her mind wrestled with one notion or another. Back to the first, forward to the third. Planning, re-planning, what to bring, what to wear. Should she tell anyone? No. Not even her own flesh and blood? Not even her favorite brother, Colin? He'd want to go with her, to help protect her. Humph. How would that work? Lord, please help me gain back my sanity.

She walked over to Cecil's desk.

"Will that be all then, Mr. McFadden?" Megan asked.

"Yes, yes, you may leave. You smell like the forest burned you down. Be on your way and I shall see you on the morrow."

"Thank you, sir." Megan nodded, gathered her shawl and left to get her bicycle. She knew he wouldn't think of that ticket she had in her dress. She was smiling as she sped by the office windows a moment later.

Megan ran down the steps to her home and burst through the front room of the family home. The house was small and crowded. Her brothers shared one room and she and Molly another. The fabric of the chairs was worn, but it matched the chaise in the corner. The curtains had been opened since she left that morning, letting in the most needed sun. The dust twinkled in the ray of sun coming through the window.

She noticed that Molly had tried to spruce up the place with wildflowers which adorned the table in a favorite vase of Ma's. Da wouldn't say a thing about it if Ma was involved. Megan supposed she had better take more notice of the duties she would be needing to do around the house, but she didn't want to. She disliked cooking and wasn't very good at keeping house, either. Maybe now she wouldn't have to.

Most of the family except Colin milled about talking of the day's events while Molly set up the supper table. Megan went into their room and closed the curtain behind her. Their room was a small square. Her narrow bed was on one side while Molly's was placed under the window so she could get the air breezing through. It helped her to sleep. There was one dresser with four drawers that they shared. It would certainly be different sleeping in here alone, but perhaps she needn't worry about that. She had a chance to go to America. After changing her clothes, Megan made sure the curtain was closed. She didn't want to fret about anyone looking in.

She moved to the front of her bed and knelt on the floor. She had discovered the loose floorboard when she was nine, and she had been using it to store her treasures ever since. She had pried the board up and dug in the dirt below and made a small area that she lined with newspaper, to collect the moisture from the dirt. Now she clutched a doll her mother had sewn for her and hugged it briefly. She put it back and grabbed the felt sack filled with her valuables. She pulled a watch from it. She didn't dare wear it while working. It was far too fine. The watch had been handed down by the women in her family. It was once a pocket watch but was converted to wrist style by her mother when she was a girl. Tangled in it was the heavy bracelet her mother had also given her.

Megan unraveled them, put on the bracelet, and admired it. She liked the contrast between the heavy band and her delicate wrist. The bracelet was much too masculine to be fashionable for her, but she enjoyed wearing it in the privacy of her room. She raised her wrist and examined the bracelet more closely. It looked old, with a dull shine where she had accidentally rubbed it. She rubbed a little more and started to see a pattern of something carved into the bracelet. A line with baby flowers started to emerge. It shined up like a new penny but she thought it was gold, not copper like a penny.

She slid it off her wrist, dropped it back into the felt sack, and looked at her money situation. She had fifty-two pounds. She paused to think about it and decided it was enough to get her to where she wanted to go, since she had the cost of the ticket covered. She grabbed a sixpence so she could buy a pint for herself down at Donovan's. She put the sixpence in her secret pocket and the rest of the money back in the sack along with the ticket. She cinched up the cords, closing it tight, and hid it back in its place. She opened the curtain and went to help her sister Molly in the kitchen.

After a bit she sat down at the supper table and looked about. "Da, where's Colin? He's not in his usual place. Is he still down at the newspaper?"

"No, he went to Donovan's for a pint or two. What's it to you, lass?" he answered in his usual curt manner.

"Aw, it's nothing that a trip down to Donovan's after supper cannot fix. I'll go and have a pint myself," Megan replied with some gusto. That got a chuckle from her sister Molly.

"And whilst you're down there be a thinking about quitting your job and getting back into helping out around here," Da said. "After Molly marries Liam, you'll be needed at home. You too need to marry, but who would take you, with a job and all? Comin' and goin' as you pleased all these years. You always were your mother's favorite. You have done her proud, but it's time to come on home and take care of us. The wedding is next month, as you know. Be thinking of that, now lass. Your mum died too early, that is for sure. I miss her." Da stirred his coffee.

Megan opened her mouth to spout off, but stopped. No, don't get into it now. She had time to figure it out. The secret was hidden in her treasure sack. Megan finished her supper silently fuming.



Afterward, Megan ran to her bicycle and started the ride down to Donovan's. This gave her the opportunity to think. How could she meet someone who might give her a spark? A slight bump in her tummy would suffice. Everyone she had met in the past was not up to snuff, in her opinion. She needed to like the chap, didn't she? One who might grasp her sensible side instead of looking for a romantic side. She wasn't even sure she had a romantic side. No one had ever given her a zing, a moment that stood still, a feeling in the pit of her stomach that felt like a thousand butterflies taking off at once. She had read so many stories of such feelings that she wished it would happen to her. Was she holding herself back? Maybe she needed to be more open to the suggestions she heard from other people. Be more open to new adventures. She turned into the lane of Donovan's and stopped with a swoosh. She propped her bicycle against the wall of the pub and turned to look out onto the harbor and see the beauty of Southampton. The sun was at the right angle to create a shimmering gleam upon the water.

Since she'd been about seven, she'd donned a cap and tucked her hair underneath and gone in the back door to Donovan's. Women weren't permitted in pubs, and certainly not a girl, but she'd been running with her brothers since she was a wee lass. Molly too, but she didn't like the pub as much as Megan. It was Megan who started singing with Colin and Niles when they needed a third for harmonies. She had grown up there. Everyone knew her.

Megan pushed open the back door and looked about the room. Inside it smelled like boiled mutton, sweat, and ale. She headed to the crapper to change her clothes and emerged a moment later tucking her borrowed shirt into Niles's trousers. She sauntered in.

"There you are, Megs," Uncle Donovan said from behind the bar. "We haven't seen so much of you lately."

"Da's been giving me a hard time, Uncle," Megan said. "Now that Molly's getting married, he wants me to quit my job and take care of him and the boys."

"That's too bad, lass," Uncle Donovan said. "We've missed your voice down here. What'll you have to drink?"

"My usual pint, please," said Megan. "Is Colin here?" She looked toward the back of the room.

"Shootin' darts, I think," he said as he pulled a pint and slid it down to her.

"Thanks, Uncle."

COLIN MAHONEY STARED into his pint and wondered how he was going to get out of this one. How had it all happened so quickly? One minute he was happy as a lark, biding his time, waiting for his ship to call and say he had a job playing his violin. Now he felt as if a noose was around his neck.

He hadn't meant for anything to come from frolicking with Catherine. He thought he knew what he was doing. He knew he was toying with her affections and all, but he never wanted her to fall in love with him. He was not the type. He was to be a man of the sea. He'd been studying for it his whole life. To play music on board a vessel off to another world had always been his dream.

At this point, a voyage to nowhere was something. He'd even be happy going to the Mediterranean. It was not his favorite destination, but it would be a very nice holiday. He had done everything they asked. He had even become a member of the Amalgamated British Musicians' Union and had been in contact with the Black Brothers of Liverpool to be included

on the list to possibly be chosen for the voyage of *Titanic*. All for nothing, since they didn't pick him. So the question was, now what? How to jump ship and leave Catherine?

That was it. He would jump aboard that big ship in the harbor and go far, far away, to a new land, a new life, and become a new man. He would get a job aboard not as a musician, but as something else on the crew. Yes, it was a splendid idea. He could possibly play on board with the other chaps while at sea. Who would know? Now, how to get such a job?

He glanced about the pub and noticed a lad a few years younger than himself, but strapping just the same. A dirty, black coal cap sat on his head. The bill was turned over his face, a small bill as it was to be flipped around so he could put on his goggles when working. The lad held his head in his hands, glowering at his empty pint. Colin watched him for a few minutes, then picked up his pint and his violin case and made his way over to the bar. He sat on a stool beside the lad and pretended to stare forward into space. In reality, he was watching the lad in the mirror. After a few long seconds, the lad's head came up and he caught Colin's gaze. His eyes were bloodshot and tired looking. His whole demeanor was low.

Colin nodded toward the empty pint. "You look like you could use another. Hey, Donovan, we could use a couple more down this way. What you say?" Colin's voice rose above the soft classical rhythm of the guitar in the background.

"I'll have a half and half if you don't mind, since you're buying and all," the boy said. Colin looked over at Donovan and saw Megan. "Hey, Little Megs, help your mate out and bring our drinks on your way over, will you?"

Megan took the half and half, joined Colin at the bar, and set down both their drinks.

"I'm Colin, and this is Megs," Colin said. "One of my clan."

"His favorite," Megan said. "I'm pleased to meet you."

"Hello, my name is Lucas. I am pleased to make both your acquaintances."

Colin asked, "What brings you down to the pub this fine evening, Little Megs? Da doesn't need me, does he?"

"I came to find you for a bit of song and some brew. That's all." She took off her cap and scratched her forehead then put it back on and shoved up her hair, the gesture as natural to her as breathing.

"My Lord, you're a lass. A—a—a girl!"

Megan replied, "Oh, don't be troublesome. I've been coming here my whole life. Everybody knows me and loves me. Since you're sitting with my brother, I figured you'd be all right with me. Let us drink up and be merry. Have you come from a ship?"

"The biggest of them all. I work as a fireman on *Titanic*. Are you in need of a job? There is a big hiring tomorrow at the ship. Bring your papers and you'll get a job. Come as a girl though. All that red hair, you could easily get a job with your looks."

Megan smiled and said, "No thank you, I have a good job already."

"All right then," Lucas said and gazed back into his glass. "Well, I haul coal now because of the coal strike, but I was hired to ferry the tenders from ports. There are all sorts of jobs on board, if you don't mind heeding to the rich. It seems to be one's station in life to bear and all."

Colin kept his remarks of his future to himself, but he filed away the information of the ship's hiring.

"Come on then, Colin," Megan said. "Grab Violet and play me a song or two. Help get my mind off my worries and all. Then let's drink to success and I'll ponder on mine. Here's to that grand ship, *Titanic*."

Colin removed his violin from the case. Lucas looked around. "Is there another lass here? Where's Violet?"

Megan laughed. "Violet is what he calls his violin."

"I was just a lad when I named her," Colin said.

"I get it, Violet, the violin. That's quite smart of you." Lucas laughed and grabbed his half and half. "I'll drink with you, lass, while Colin plays. Here's to *Titanic*."

MEGAN LAY IN bed that night, trying not to be restless so she wouldn't wake Molly. She couldn't stop the thoughts in her head though. It would only be a glance and a ticket punch from the agent on board, Megan reminded herself. It was the number they would note, if anything, ticket number 242154. That's all it would take. It was just a small moment out of time.

Oh, Lord, what was she thinking? Just what she had been dreaming about since she first started working all those years ago. There where she'd been watching all those ships coming and going, day by day, night after night.

Stop! Megan tossed in her little bed. Okay, she could do this. The ticket was not a problem, since the name hadn't been filled in by the patron, and she had piles of the regular forms the passengers got with their tickets. It was the boarding pass that was ruining her sleep. It had gone into the little Frenchman's fire, and she couldn't get on the ship without one.

It felt so right to go, though. She was going to follow her heart even if it hurt some people in the end. It was a new beginning for her. She was sorry that she would have to miss Molly's wedding and all, but she was an adult. She was the oldest sister. She could say what track of life she chose, and she did not choose this anymore. She was too young, with her whole life before her, to feel so old. She needed to leap. Leap and the rope will appear. Isn't that what Ma always said?

Why did these thoughts keep jumping into her head? If she kept fretting about things out of her control she was going to make herself go mad. She needed to get some sleep so she could actually do what she had been lying there thinking about for the last hour or so. She had to get some sleep. The morning would come too soon.

Megan turned over and closed her eyes against the moonlight. "Lord, please keep me safe and help me to follow the path in which you lead, for I am ever faithful."

MEGAN OPENED THE office the next morning. Cecil wasn't due in until nine. She was a lucky girl. As she unlocked the safe and opened the curtains, she glanced about the office. This was the place she had spent her working years. Even the splits in the wooden timbers had become dear to her, since she had named the little faces she saw in the knots. Adding the slight ink eyes was her way of never being alone. She was always watched, but never alone. In a good way though. They were friendly.

All right then, ink, pen, bolder black ink, nibs, paper, newspaper, stamp, creaser, that blotter and what else could she need, Megan asked herself as she gathered the items. She would just reissue all the stuff that went into the package she regularly mailed to passengers after they bought their tickets. Anyone who was anyone would have already bought tickets for the maiden voyage of *Titanic*. They would have tags for luggage, the stickers for luggage and boxes to be

put into storage, all the things she had been issuing for the last three months. The White Star Line issued the tags, and Megan didn't have any for herself, but she thought she could create her own just as well. She pulled her ticket from her hiding place to check the cabin assignment. Deck F, Cabin B, berth 4. That wouldn't do. It was a family berth near the bow. Single women were placed in the stern. She would need to choose something in the stern that hadn't been assigned as yet. With just a few days left before sailing, there were only a few berths not purchased. She would work on the boarding pass and issue herself some luggage tags for deep storage for now. She would have time to fill in the berth assignment soon enough.

Megan glanced about, walked to the door, opened it, and went out onto the walkway of the dock. She peered out toward *Titanic*. "Busy as ever, I see," she said as if someone were about. With no would-be patrons scurrying around, Megan thought this might be the best time to do her tomfoolery. She turned her back and shut the door with enough force to make the little bells jangle. Only after walking around the high counters and behind the closed steel shutters did she really relax. Now, very carefully, she dipped her pen into the heavy, dark India ink and placed the nib onto the sticker tag marked for not-needed items. She left the tip on the paper a smidge too long, which was enough for the ink to follow the veins of the paper and create a royal mess. Okay, that was not going to work. The paper was too porous. She needed a different type of ink. She switched out nibs and ink and tried again.

She set to marking the ticket number onto the luggage tags, disclaimer tags, and immigration papers, then turned to the boarding pass. She had to create that from scratch, and it took a few tries to get it right. There, that was better. It was like there was a being inside her, telling her what to do. She was so practiced in the issuance of tickets. Lord, this is too easy, she thought. The last touch of 242154 had just been applied to the boarding pass when the front doorbell jangled. Megan swooped down a newspaper and covered everything she had been working on.

"A good day to you sir. How may I help you?" Megan asked with a smile in her voice and one on her face.

By the time she returned to her desk, the documents had dried and were somewhat passable. Well, actually, they were great. If she ever needed a new kind of job she could take up counterfeiting. She had a steady hand.

It was going to work. She would just have to see if she could find a berth for herself that had not been sold and find a bag or two for her things, add that berth number to her boarding pass and cabin bag tag, and—thank you Lord, thank you Lord, from the bottom of my heart. She felt like she'd just been granted her wings. She would praise the Lord again if he could get her on board that ship.

Amen to that.

# Chapter Two

## 05 April 1912 — Southampton

FRANCES CHESWICK WISHED she were somewhere else. These dances of late had been on the dull side. She also wished she could say what she wanted when asked, but she only gave appropriate answers to questions like, “How do you feel about Mr. Johansson?”

She didn’t feel a thing for Mr. Johansson, she wished she could say. He was a nice enough gentleman and all, but that was just it. He was a gentleman. Her actual reply? “He is such a gentleman.”

“Boring, boring, boring. If I have to dance one more dance with one more bumbling idiot with roaming hands, I shall scream. I will do it, you do know that, right Alice?”

Alice replied, “Yes, my girl. Shall I fetch you another spot of tea Franny?” Alice had been living with the family since Frances was seven years old, a God-sister, if there was such a thing. She was the only one who could get away with using Frances’s childhood name.

“No, I shall get it myself. These dances are becoming somewhat of a bore. It’s the same people, gathering after gathering. The same crowd showed up at the Sterling Castle just last month. An intelligent conversation would do. It is too bad that I can’t be the one to choose who to dance with. That would set the tongues to waggle. Oh, Alice, I don’t know why you hide yourself back here with the refreshments. I love what you did with your hair tonight. Those ringlets just in front of your ears are lovely. The light catches all the colors in your hair, the light brown and gold and red. It accentuates your blue eyes just so. But oh, that color on you. Who would have guessed a vibrant red wouldn’t clash with your hair color but it actually enhances it. You should be out there mingling, trying to find yourself a—a—a someone. Hmm? Or, you could dance with me? I would enjoy that immensely. But I can see by your stern look that I am dreaming. So, enough of this talk. I do see that Father is speaking to a rather fine looking woman and gentleman over there. I shan’t be long.” Frances whisked off.

By the time Frances had crossed the room, her cheeks had cooled from throwing herself out there once again to Alice and she was able to greet her father calmly. He was in deep discussion with the gentleman, speaking of ships and land to be had, the green kind of land like in Ireland with rivers and forests and plains galore. That’s what could be found in a place called Pennsylvania.

Frances approached them with the air of belonging. Her father smiled at her as she placed her arm through his. She nodded and noticed that the striking woman was studying her intently. Frances met her stare.

“May I present my daughter, Frances,” Fletcher Cheswick said. “These fine people are the Westbrookes, Emily and Ethan. Twins. Can you see the resemblance, kitten?”

“Yes, it is nice to meet both of you,” Frances said. “Is Pennsylvania in the United States? In America?”

“Yes. I must say again that you and your family should join us on holiday back to the States and see for yourselves that what I say is true,” Ethan said. “A bit of a voyage into New York and



then off to Pennsylvania, down the Allegheny on one of our ships. Westbrooke Shipping would be at your service.” Ethan turned to Frances. “Since your name is Cheswick, you would be most interested in this bit of news I shall share with you now. Not but ten years ago, our little community of Lincoln had to be renamed. It seems that there were others in the state that had chosen that very same name, so we had to choose another. Too many Lincolns in the few states surrounding became very confusing. So we chose the name Cheswick after a village in Britain.”

“That could have been after us,” Frances said. “Isn’t that a strange little fact? And you are inviting my father and our family to go to this place called Cheswick, in the Americas? Oh, Father, I would love to go to America, to a city with our name. Please Father. Please.”

Ethan nodded. “I have been trying to talk your father into the idea, but was unsuccessful. That is, until you arrived, young lady.”

Fletcher Cheswick answered Ethan quickly, “That does sound like a splendid idea, now that I have thought about it. Yes, I am inclined to go on holiday to see the Americas. I’ve never been, and I know the family is getting tired of going to the Canary Islands each year. Yes, we should try for a bit of variety. When does that ship leave again? Is there any chance of gaining passage for the family this late? Where is Helene? That wife of mine is never where I want her to be. She, too, will need to hear of this splendid opportunity. One we must jump upon before she sails. Frances, go and fetch your mother. I’m sure she will have a thing or two to say about all of this.”

“Oh, Father, that sounds marvelous. And you, sir, are the answer to my prayers. I shall go fetch Mother.” Off she went in a scamper to the adjoining room, as fast as she possibly could in the confining long skirt she wore that only let her step a short way, ever so daintily. Her long, black hair bounced along as she hurried. She felt light and happy as she turned back to look at her father. Again, she noticed the handsome woman seeming to dissect her with just her eyes. She had such penetrating eyes.

“Alice, come with me and talk to these people. You won’t believe it. They want us to go to America with them, and Father is agreeable. I am supposed to find Mother, but you go over there first, and Mother and I will catch up. Oh, this is so exciting. Go on now.” Frances scurried off again.

WHY DID FRANCES still insist on telling Alice what to do? Despite the fact that Alice was five years older, Frances had never gotten it into her mind that Alice did not need to be mothered. After all these years, one would think she would outgrow meddling into her affairs. Lord knows Alice had to sneak out of the house already when she had her little evenings out. She suspected Frances had the same leanings for dalliance as herself, but it would not be with her. No matter how hard Frances tried, Alice would make sure that never happened.

Alice gathered her glass of rum punch and wandered over to where Fletcher and another couple stood conversing. There was something vaguely familiar about the woman. Had Alice seen her before? Her mind searched for some more details. She’d seen the woman somewhere, Alice was sure of it. She just couldn’t find the incident or the setting in her mind.

Did Franny say they were going to America? Why, Alice hadn’t been back there in ages. It had been at least, yes, eleven years to be exact. So much time that Alice thought she must have forgotten everything there was to being an American. That was a different lifetime ago, with different rules.

Now don't go and fall for another one of Franny's schemes, Alice reminded herself. They always seemed to end badly for her. Alice walked over and stood near Fletcher, her hands folded in front of her, waiting.

The familiar woman stared at Alice for a long moment and then a slight smile broke out on her face. She leaned over to whisper something to the gentleman standing next to her, never taking her eyes off Alice. It was unnerving.

EMILY WESTBROOKE HAD taken notice of the attractive young woman with the beautiful, dark, voluptuous hair cascading down her back. She had such nice possibilities. She was awfully young, but that had never stopped Emily before. She liked the black hair that tumbled down the girl's attractive backside in the bouncy, flouncy way it had. Oh my, what a handful that would be. Emily all but purred right then and there. She was careful to reveal nothing on her face, though she couldn't prevent a flick of her eyes. Composure, Em, she reminded herself.

She did need to find a playmate for the voyage home. Someone light and receptive to her innuendos. She really must go trolling as soon as she hit the ship. These parties were getting to be so humdrum. Same party, same people.

The parties did delight her brother, though. He had a way at these types of gatherings, whereas it was so hard for Emily to do the same. Ethan's little saying popped into her head. A dance is a chance at romance. So far, all she'd had was the one this trip. But it was enough of a tumble to remember, even now, as she thought back.

Oh Lord, there she was. It was that beautiful woman she had dallied with in the garden at the Sterling Castle, which had ended with a slight encounter in the cloakroom. How interesting. Emily had just been thinking about her.

Emily watched her approach. Didn't she just see this beauty with the young woman with the dark hair a moment ago, before she came over to them? Tonight the woman was wearing a red frothy dress, silken and layered, tight in the middle with a belt of flowers. It fit her hips to perfection, then spread all the way to the floor. She moved so elegantly in it. Her lovely golden-brown locks formed ringlets beside her ears. Emily tried to catch the woman's eye to see how she responded. Emily looked directly at her, into her eyes, and nodded. The woman responded by also discreetly nodding her head at Emily.

Where was this conversation going? She wondered if it was really a coincidence that this man's last name was Cheswick, when that was where she and Ethan hailed from. But if this was another daughter, then Emily had died and gone to heaven.

The beauty stood beside Fletcher and turned as Helene and Frances arrived.

"Please," Emily said to Fletcher, but she let her eyes roam to the rest of the family. "Join us on our voyage across the Atlantic into the wonderful, beautiful New York City in the United States of America. How I have missed the feeling of the city. There is nothing like it. The scenery is divine. Oh, the time we could all have, on board. And this is the rest of your family, I presume?" She turned to the beauty. "Hello, I don't recall your name, but I never forget a face. Didn't we meet at the Sterling Castle Ball a few weeks ago?"

The woman blushed but had no reply.

"This is Alice, and may I present my mother, Helene," Frances said.

“Pleased to meet you,” Emily replied. “What fun we shall have on this voyage, if you do decide to join us, that is. I don’t wish to press you, but the ship does sail in a few days.”

She could explore the ship with the Cheswick girls as her companions. The lessons she could teach in those days of the voyage. Oh my, the things she could learn, as well. Emily, ever so slightly, licked her lips, and smiled.

“You will find that Westbrooke Shipping has very high standards,” Ethan was saying, “and we would be most delighted to show them all to you. The benefit of our two companies together would upend the shipping world.”

How delightful. This might be the best voyage yet. It just might live up to its name as the greatest ship of all. Emily almost purred again.

# Chapter Three

## 06 April 1912 — Southampton

JACOB DARCY TOOK a break from moving coal and concealed himself in the stack room, his favorite on-board hiding place, to re-read the letter. His mind reeled.

How had she found him? Boy, after all this time, he could still remember. Those memories took him back. First times are like that. How could this be? After all, it had been at least eighteen some years, give or take a few months. Now she had the audacity of asking too much from him. But a daughter? He read it again.

**Dear Jacob, I pray that this letter finds you to be in good health because I am not. I have somehow contracted tuberculosis and am dying. You have a daughter named after my father. Her name is Alexandria. We live at 1050 Le Franc d' le Sperrino, Cherbourg, France. Please, I beg of you, come and save Alexandria, for she needs you now, more than she ever has. My faith in you is strong, Jacob. Do not fail me or your daughter. I loved you briefly, she can love you forever. Yours, Marchant'e.**

Jacob threw his hands into the air, letting papers flutter all around him. Aye me, he thought, I have a daughter. What to do? What to do? A mostly grown woman, come to think of it. Why would she want him to come fetch her? She couldn't know anything about him, except what her mother told her, and she didn't know much. A daughter? What was he supposed to do about it? He shook his head. Only with Marchant'e.

He had not seen or heard from her since that day she boarded the clipper ship bound for France. Was he to believe that this child was his? On a note drafted by a woman that he'd had relations with? She said that this Alexandria was his. He'd been but fifteen and a virile young chap, if he did say so himself. Strapping. He had already been working in the yards in Belfast for two years by then. He'd become a welder by trade later on, and now the White Star Line had him supervising the mucking out of the ore to shift the coal from one giant ship to the other. There was a coal strike going on. Of all times. Bloody hard work, Jacob thought, but the ship was a thing of beauty. He had been watching all the comings and goings, the loading of furnishings and glassware, and the trunks of the crew all preparing to leave on the maiden voyage of *Titanic*. The craftsmanship was outstanding and the layout superb.

Shovelful after shovelful, a worker filled the steel boxes to be hauled on board by the giant cranes. After the last shovelful Jacob jumped on board the coal and maneuvered the four heavy chains over the S hook before yelling to the crane operator, "Take 15 up." In a few moments he heard the repeat of "15 up," and then, "15 up" from farther away. The chains yanked taut and Jacob held on with both hands firmly around the chain, nothing through the loops. Could bust a finger clean off if it's cold enough and you're too stupid to not put your fingers into holes that don't matter. So he'd been told, anyway. He had been there too long for that to be him.

The load went through the cargo hold opening and was transported down to the coal room beside the reciprocating engine room that led into the turbine engine room. Jacob jumped off the load. It had been a long hard day, but he thought he still had enough time to be able to tour the engine rooms and stacks before he was supposed to get off the ship for the next shift.

He left the boiler room, taking a small metal walkway leading toward the last two stacks. The final stack felt cool to the touch. He'd discovered early on that the last stack was only for ventilation and aesthetic purposes, not for heat. He'd claimed a small portion of the empty space inside as his own and had been using it as a getaway and sleeping place between shifts for the past seven months. No one had ever, to his knowledge, given close inspection to the door he'd welded into the pattern of the last eighty-foot stack. Given that he was the master welder, he'd welded and riveted the door into the bottom of the stack to fit his purposes, making it aesthetically correct so it was a part of the stack. Upon further inspection, the hinges and such were visible, but Jacob had been at his job a long while. No one was going behind and checking up on his welds. It took him seven months of working on his own, doing things just right, and here it was. A thing of beauty, if he did say so.

As a senior member of the crew of *Titanic*, Jacob often had the ship basically to himself, especially at night. When he'd volunteered to be the night watchman, way back in November, he was just looking for an extra job. He'd been the night watchman as well as the lead welder during the day. Now it had become a godsend. Clever, he thought. Here he was, on the eve of the launch, one of the twelve security guards walking deck by deck looking for what? People like him, that's what. Who is watching the watcher?

Now, before the launch, there were a few things he had to do. He'd need to "requisition" a deck chair and a small table to make the room more comfortable. Who would have thought when he made this room that he would actually get to use it and no one would be the wiser? Now he was going to try to bring his daughter on board in Cherbourg, France, and hide her in the stack room. If she was willing, that is. He'd have to see first if she even wanted to join him. All he had to offer her was this trip to America on *Titanic*. She could mingle with the passengers all day and sleep in the stack at night. It was such a short voyage. They said it would be the fastest crossing ever, faster than the *Lusitania* even, and with more tare weight too. The *Lusitania* could only do twenty knots at top speed where *Titanic* was expected to do a crisp twenty-three.

He checked Deck C, the Palm Room, walked through the standard passenger lounge and up the stairs onto Deck B, then on up to Deck A and the First Class suites. Wandering the halls, checking door after door, he was still astonished at the sheer beauty and elegance of each stateroom. There were huge airy bedrooms with fireplaces, tables with linen and dishes smartly set, ready to be filled with beautiful bouquets of flowers. He had seen them in the flower shop, getting all prepared for this voyage. The teak and cherry side tables added flavor to the rooms. Each was beautiful, in a home away from home that floats. Stupendous.

The next morning, Jacob sat in the telegraph office awaiting his turn. Over and over he repeated in his head what he wanted to write on the telegram.

**Landing in Cherbourg *Titanic* ship Ten April at 730pm Stop Join me Going to America Stop Pack Light Wear Red scarf Stop Jacob Darcy**

Whew, the telegram was gone. He needed to calm down and think. There was so much planning left to do. The first task was to figure out how to get Alexandria on board in Cherbourg without a ticket.



THE LINE FOR jobs on *Titanic* stretched along the pier farther than the ship was long. Colin could see the offices of the White Star Line from where he stood. He wondered if Megan could see him from there. What a view she had of the ship every day. Lucky girl.

Colin was trying to be positive. Maybe he could gain employment in a coal room like Lucas and play music with the boys in the dining room when they were short a string or needed a spot to be filled in. He could be handy in a crisis.

“The best of the best she is,” Colin said aloud to the others standing in line. “Mark my words, the best ever. She is the most marvelous ship that sails the seas.” The line shuffled forward. “And I want on it,” he added softly.

This day, the sixth of April, 1912, was going to make history for him, he swore it. But the long line he had been standing in for the last four hours seemed to be slowing down even more.

“What are those guys in the white suits doing up there?” Colin asked the man behind him.

“Dunno,” the man answered.

Colin’s brain hurt. Why had he kept drinking with those lads at Donovan’s last night? And Catherine? Poor, poor Catherine. She would be devastated when she realized he was really going this time. He was finally off on a voyage. Ho, ho, and what a voyage she would be. Beyond anything he could even imagine. All this while, he’d been busting his bum playing at the pub twice a week, for ages it seemed. He’d tried to follow all the rules to be a professional, but here he was, still stuck in line, waiting, waiting.

Poor, poor Catherine. He prayed he would not break her heart. She would get over him. He hoped she would realize he was really not that great a catch.

Colin’s thoughts were interrupted by a man wearing a white steward’s jacket with very smart buttons. Right, pay attention.

“Stick out your tongue, lad, and hold it a bit.”

Colin stuck out his tongue. The man in the bowtie poked a stick in Colin’s mouth and moved it around, then peeked in his ears and eyes and ruffled his hair all about and then finally scratched at Colin’s short, thin line of a beard that scraped below his jaw. Without a word, the steward’s hands fell below the waistline of Colin’s pants. Colin gave a start. If those hands got any closer the steward might be finding them bound behind his back and being told to leave Colin’s privates alone. They weren’t called private for no reason.

“What’s your job experience?”

“I’ve been in the news printing business, sir.”

“How long?”

“Seven years, sir. But my real talent is music. I play the violin.”

”How old are you?”

“Twenty-eight, sir.”

“Do you have any children?”

“Not that I’m aware of, sir,” Colin said, and the man chuckled.

The next thing Colin knew, he was shoved a piece of paper. No, it was not just one piece of paper, it was a stack of papers.

“Sign these papers and take them over to *Titanic* Deck E, for further instructions. You are now a printer’s helper.”

What? That was it? Colin glanced through the stack while walking down the pier to board the greatest ship ever. The closer he got, the bigger it seemed. He could hardly believe it. He had made it. He had lived a good life up 'til now and it was bound to get only better from this day forward.

Let's see, gangplank four. He'd probably need these luggage tags and stickers for his trunk. Apparently some would be put in storage, not to be touched until they hit New York City. There were vouchers for embarkation and deportation and immigration papers to be signed and filled out before reporting to a meeting at 4 pm on the Stern Deck E in the Third Class general room. Bow Deck E, Cabin E59, berth 3. That would be his new address for the next seven days. It was very confusing. He'd always found that putting things to music helped him remember better.

He knew what to do. He'd think up a little ditty to remember his place on *Titanic*. Okay, here goes.

**A printer's helper is now what I be.  
I live on *Titanic* Deck E, berth 3.  
My cabin has a number which cannot find a rhyme  
So it's just Cabin E59.**

Not bad. Colin was a little overwhelmed. He walked onto the gangplank and handed over the papers to the officer on board. The officer found what he was looking for and shoved the rest back to Colin.

"Here, mate, take these to Deck E, but stop off at the dining room to fill out the proper papers. You would be doing yourself a favor to have them done before you get there. Start off on the right foot and all."

Colin left, holding the papers in one hand and his violin in the other. He used his back to open doors to a new hallway for him to explore. He noticed some young women in crisp new uniforms. He could tell some of them didn't bother with the laundry and had put them immediately on, fold marks and all. They were dusting and polishing the woodwork to make it gleam.

A young man in a white uniform was wiping down the wood wainscot, doing the task in great style. He stood and let Colin pass by. Colin stepped through the door that was opened by a man in another all-white uniform. It was a very sharp image. Colin stood a little taller.

"Thank you, but you didn't have to do that for me," Colin said.

"I was practicing, is all. Getting ready for the big day," the man said.

"Good man," Colin said with a swagger. "Carry on."

He found himself in an enormous room filled with tables, fifty of them at least. Wait staff in the back were busy spreading white cloths on the tables, while women followed setting sparkling glassware and utensils down on them. Brocade stuffed chairs surrounded the tables. Other men and a few women were scattered about near the front of the room, their heads bent over stacks of papers like his. He nodded a greeting to those who looked up and found a bare table. He didn't want to get the pristine tablecloth dirty.

Colin felt in his pocket for a pencil. He was about to give his life in signatures to the *R.M.S. Titanic*. Read, sign, repeat. Read, sign, repeat. Colin was good at reading and writing. He had the papers done in a jiffy and had some extra time before the meeting. He took the chance to explore this ship of dreams.

As Colin strolled the decks and halls, he encountered many workmen doing their various jobs. The different uniforms and caps signified a rank of sorts. Those in all-white were stewards, the blue jacket men were porters and those with stripes were officers. No one questioned him about what he was doing wandering about. He was just one of many.

He entered a huge, open hall with a marble floor. Small tables and plush chairs were scattered about the room, and a wide, well-polished staircase in the middle led upward. An etched glass dome accented with gold covered the whole ceiling over the staircase. The light pouring in glanced off two gold cherubs standing as tall as Violet on the railings at the bottom of the stairs. There was at least as much gold as black on the wrought iron railing and gold on the face of the wooden clock on the wall. He had never seen so much gold in one place. Even the dust particles dancing in the air were turned to gold sparkles from the light shining down through the dome.

He climbed the set of stairs and on the landing stopped to look at the carved wooden clock on the wall. Women in Grecian clothes held ribbons with a timepiece in the middle. He noticed the time and continued to walk up the stairs. The railings were smooth to the touch, with carved leaves on the sides.

The different areas he went through were each a magnificent usage of space and imagination. He came upon at least four grand pianos, on adjacent floors, all discreetly hidden by palms or doorways or set back in coves. He stopped on one of the landings on the staircase to study the fine oil portraits that were hanging on the walls. Some were filled with landscapes full of colorful scenery that depicted another land he was unfamiliar with. He wished at times he possessed the patience to paint. He walked on and eventually found his own cabin. He almost walked on by, but he stepped back. There it was. He was on Deck E, Cabin E59, berth 3, just like the mantra he had been repeating.

He was there, in his cabin, for a crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. His home away from home. It was all working out just fine. Who would ever have thought he would wind up a printer's helper? The Atlantic Daily Bulletin. *Titanic's* newspaper. It was far better than being a coal mucker. Colin set his violin on his bunk. He examined the room. Two bunks lined each side, with a cabinet underneath for personal storage and a toilet at the end of the hall. Not that bad of a place to end up for a five to seven day voyage. He sat upon his bunk and took out his pocket watch. It seemed he had a bit more time before that meeting in Stern, Deck E, Third Class general room for further instructions. He should go find his mates and take his time getting to that meeting. Maybe he would go back to that golden staircase?

As he sat there, pondering his fate, he decided to play Violet. The first song he started was one that he'd been working on for the last week. It wasn't quite finished. A half a measure in from the second stance of the composition, a knock sounded on his door. Colin set Violet down and opened the door. He found a tall, wiry gentleman standing there.

"Hi there, was that you playing?" the gentleman asked.

"Yes it was," said Colin. "Am I bothering you? Is that why you've stopped and knocked? I'll stop at once if that be the case."

"Actually, I'm with the orchestra here on board. I don't believe we've met. My name is Wally. I believe you are in the wrong room. All my musicians are being housed together in a different wing than this. That was beautiful. What was it? Perhaps you could play it again but from the beginning. I am unfamiliar with it."

"I can assure you that I am in the correct room, and I can play that tune for you. It's one of my own." Colin smiled as he picked up Violet and placed her under his chin. A soft sweet sound

came forth. He played for a few minutes and then finished. He placed Violet in a standing position, then dropped both arms to the attention stance of a resting musician.

“That was wonderful. What did you say your name was? Why are you down here in this area? All of the orchestra are on D deck, in the bow, starboard side. They sanctioned two rooms for us.”

Colin replied, “But sir, I’m not with the orchestra. I’m a printer’s helper.”

“Is that so? You play so beautifully. Do you know any songs from the Seamen’s Handbook?”

“Well, I think I know all the songs you’ll be doing on board this fine ship.”

“What, all three hundred and fifty-two of them?” Wally sounded astounded.

“Well, yes. You see, I did try to audition for a position here on *Titanic*, but I never heard back from the Black Brothers. So I got on board as a printer’s helper instead.”

“What shall I call you?”

“My apologies sir, my name is Colin Mahoney, from Southampton, sir.”

“Good to meet you. Just call me Wally and we should get along fine. Would you mind playing number twenty-seven then?”

Colin began the piece slowly and surely, breaking where needed and then taking up again as if he were playing in the ensemble. He lost himself in the music. He had forgotten how beautiful this song was.

Broken out of his reverie by a sound from the ship, he stopped. Embarrassed at being caught playing with such emotion, he smiled over at Wally.

Wally smiled back. “Well done, lad. You played that with some heart. What can you do with number seventy-two? It’s one of my personal favorites.”

Colin took a moment to turn the pages of the songbook in his mind and then placed Violet under his chin. Adjusting his shoulders he launched into the song with gusto. Note after note he played, enjoying himself, not noticing Wally after a bit. He finished up the last note with a flourish of his bow into the air, opened his stance, and waited.

“Splendid, my boy, just splendid. I can imagine they had a hard time not placing you on board. You are a fine musician, but you’re still very young. Seniority is a great influence, you understand?”

“No, I hadn’t thought of it in that way before, sir. Thank you for that,” Colin replied.

“Do you think you might be up to playing with us when we set sail? Once we’re out of British waters, it’s my orchestra to guide and play, so I’ll invite you now, but do wait until we are in open seas to come find me. We get off shift at eleven, and I’m sure the boys would be up for a bit more. Think on it. I must be going. Thanks for playing for me. This will be a jolly good crossing.”

With that said, Wally left the cabin. Colin stood there and shook his head. Had that just happened? Here he had been wondering what his job really was?

But now? Such an opportunity had arisen that he couldn’t pass it up.

He would have to break it to the family tonight. Not that it would be too much of a shock. He’d been trying to get on a ship for three years now. It was just time. He couldn’t forget about Catherine, either. He had a busy night ahead. First, though, the meeting in the Third Class general room waited. Colin smiled to himself. His life had taken an exceptional turn for the good.

A printer’s helper? What the hell was that anyway? Well, he guessed it made sense. He supposed a ship the size of *Titanic* would have a daily newspaper on board, and the presses and the reporting would need to be done. He supposed they wanted him because he had some

experience along those lines. He could put together stories that they could publish without much editing needed. It was like his old job being a printer for the Southampton News. The Atlantic Daily Bulletin, littered with the happenings of passengers, their stories, where they hail from. Daily menus, too, he saw in his papers. Menus would be published for the four restaurants, the First, Second and even Third Class dining rooms, and also the Palm Room. Of course it would be a popular part of the service and all. The printer would certainly need a helper.



# Chapter Four

## 07 April 1912 — Southampton

THAT NIGHT AT the family dinner Megan thought she'd be breaking everyone's heart by telling them she would be leaving on a voyage to the Americas. But no, her big, ugly brute of a brother had to make his big announcement that he was going to be on that ship, her ship, working in the print shop. Who knew there would be a press on board to churn out a daily newspaper? She would keep her mouth shut and not say anything.

Colin was so happy. She hadn't seen him this ecstatic since he found the joy of music in Violet. Here he was singing about his place on *Titanic*. Something about Deck E, berth 3 and not having a rhyme for E59. Well at least she would know where to find him once she got on board. On board!

But the news from Colin actually worked in Megan's favor. Her beautiful, wonderful, creative big brother, and right smart too, was going to be on board. She wouldn't be alone after all. She wouldn't tell or let him see her until they had set sail and were well out of the harbor, when it was too late to call the authorities or do what they did with stowaways, or whatever she was. It wouldn't stop him from putting her off on one of the two ports they were sailing into, but he wouldn't leave her in a strange country without him being there to protect her.

She would write a note and leave it on her bed when she left on Wednesday morning. A note to say goodbye, a fond farewell to all she left. Once they discovered it and learned that she had gone off with Colin, it would be too late to call the port authorities and report it. They would more than likely be far out to sea, on their way to Cherbourg, France, six to ten hours from port. Yes, it was a fine way to tell the family that she had gone on holiday, of sorts.

Now she only had three days left to get things done. Megan sat on her stool working on her papers at her desk where she could still see if anyone came into the ticket counter. Upon hearing the bells above the door, she threw a newspaper over her desk and practically ran up to greet the customer.

"Good day, sir," Megan said.

The man made a gargling sound before he spoke. He stood with a hand in his vest pocket, like a general in the army. He had a stout build, with a long handlebar moustache. He had removed the bowler hat and held it in his other hand. He was proud and rich, Megan was sure of it. It all but oozed out of him.

"May I help you?" asked Megan.

"Yes, hrmph, my name is Fletcher Cheswick and I would like to inquire as to passage on the ship *Titanic* that sails this Wednesday, for my family. To New York City," he said with authority, as if she might be confused as to where that particular ship was headed. "I need a couple of suites or something of the sort to suit our needs. Is that still possible at this late date?"

"Yes, sir." Megan pulled out the map of the ship and pointed to what she had still available. "Okay, let's see here. I have on the starboard side of the ship, one suite left that has a great room with a fireplace, tables, linens and accessories included, with a large bedroom that has a double

bed, and there's a small bed suitable for a child or a single person on the other side of the room. A curtain surrounds the beds for a little more privacy. A small water closet is discreetly hidden in the back of the great room. All with locking doors to ensure privacy. It is a ship, after all."

"Oh, hrmph," he grunted. "That sounds nice and adequate for my wife and daughter. I have another? A lady friend of my wife and daughter, my goddaughter? A companion of sorts. No need for First Class. Do you have anything suitable for her? Somewhat close by?"

"Yes sir, right down this corridor and down the stairs, take another right, and I can place her in this berth of four. She will be comfortable and still within your direction." Megan circled the location that she was speaking of with her finger. "It is on the Second Class level, which has its own dining room, all the luxurious surroundings and comforts of First Class, just toned down a bit. If you get what I mean." Megan leaned in and tried to put a conspiring tone in her voice.

"Those will do nicely."

"Excellent. Then I would need a total of eight hundred ninety pounds for the First Class berths with an extra twelve pounds for the other berth. You will have twenty-four hours in which to revoke services or to pay in whole as to the services rendered. Your paperwork for the voyage will be ready to be picked up tomorrow after noon. I usually mail these out but we seem to be in a bit of a bind here for the post, so I shall hold them here at the office. Either you or a representative of the family can pick them up. *Titanic* will be opened for boarding on the tenth of April at 9:30 a.m., leaving promptly at noon. If you are not on board by noon, I'm sorry to say, *Titanic* will set sail without you. Thank you for your patronage from all of us at the White Star Line," Megan said, trying not to sound like she hadn't said that before, or even fifty times or more in the last few days.

The ship sailed in three days. She had so much left to do. Megan smiled brilliantly.

The man handed over the money and left.

From behind her she heard, "Well done, Megan." Cecil sounded proud. "Someday you'll make a fine clerk. Let me take that money from you. And don't forget to mark the sale on the master sheets and mark out the rooms too."

# Chapter Five

## 08 April 1912 — Southampton / France

LUCAS AND JACOB sat in their favorite booth at Donovan's, as they had every night since the landing in Southampton. Only two days left in this hellhole, thought Lucas. He was ready to leave now. What's with all the new mail getting transported? He knew he had signed on for that and all, but it was supposed to be easy. When was that part coming? Thank God, only a few days 'til sailing. He was so ready to set sail and be gone. Sure he missed his girlfriend and all, but she was the one who told him he should get on this ship.

"Never been to France," said Lucas enthusiastically, and then he noticed Jacob staring into his pint. "What's the matter, ol' man?"

"I've been trying to figure something out, can't you see, mon," Jacob replied.

Lucas looked at Jacob, who had gotten lower in his chair and slumped even more. "What ails you, my friend? What has you so down this fine evening?"

Jacob leaned over his pint, as if he'd made a sudden decision, and said, "Can I trust you, boy?"

Lucas nodded. "Course you can."

"If I tells you what's been brewing in my head, you can't be going spouting off about like you do. No going to your superiors or anything of the sort. You need to give me your word." Jacob stuck out his right hand. "If you shake my hand then I have your solemn oath that not a word gets spilled about my plans, that what I say is secret."

Lucas thrust out his right hand and grabbed Jacob's. "You have my word. Word!" Lucas laughed at himself, slapping his thigh. "Well?" Lucas quieted his laughter. "What is it?"

Jacob sipped quietly as if gathering his thoughts. He swallowed loudly and said, "I have a daughter. I've never met her. She is probably eighteen by now and I have sent off a telegram asking her to join me on board *Titanic* and sail to the Americas and start a new life. Her mother is dying. She could be dead by now, for all I know. I haven't heard back from her. I'm not sure what to do at this time, or even, if she says yes, how to get her on board? I cannot purchase a ticket for her. They cost too much. Her name is Alexandria and I have only found out about this a bit ago and have been trying to figure it out this whole time. I haven't come up with much, and the days are passing by much too quickly as it is."

Lucas scrunched up his face with thought. His lips pressed together tightly before he opened his mouth to speak. "I think I might have a solution to your problem. I've thought of using it myself. They've had me loading the post these last few days with a couple of good gents. There are a lot of extra mail bags waiting to be filled with packages or boxes or bundles of letters all heading to different places. It's been very exciting and all, but it's given me ideas. I think I can help you out, my friend. Once we hit French waters, I'll be helping to transport people, luggage and incoming mail. On the trip back to the ship, we shall hide your daughter in a mail sack. They are huge. I'm sure I would fit, so I know she will. Then, all we have to do is carry her on board and set her in the back so as she can get out. Cinch up the bag a wee bit, then a little wiggle, out

she comes. Just like a damn cocoon. We leave Queensland after that, and it is open sea until New York. It'll be back to being a fireman for me after that, in the coal room. I admit I'll be glad to be back at it." Lucas laughed out loud, again. "The mail room's more work than you might think. You see, all the mail is placed into a huge holding room that houses all the mail plus the clerks that sort the mail and deliver it on board too, if needed. There are three British mail clerks and two Americans that sort that mail, mainly for the States. All in all, between them all they will probably work up to seven hundred thousand letters over the course of the voyage."

"Mail sacks, you say?" Jacob asked.

"It's simply brilliant, you know it is," Lucas said. "Wish I could say I thought it up myself, but I didn't. I heard some guy talking in his drink the other day and he planted the idea in my brain. After I heard it, I started thinking it was a right good plan. Thought about using it for myself in Queensland, but I think I'll stay on board. I spied a little filly I wouldn't mind taking a ride on, if you get my drift?" Lucas wiggled his eyebrows up and down. "Well, anyways, it's a good plan. So, what do you think? Could it work for your girl?"

Just then Colin walked by with his violin in hand. "Hey, Colin," Lucas called. "Come have a pint or two with us. Let me introduce you to a mate on the ship."

"You're on *Titanic*, you say," Colin spoke enthusiastically. "After a bit I shall join you, but now I've got to sing for my supper here one last time."

"One last time? What's happened since we last spoke?" Lucas asked earnestly. "You didn't lose this sweet gig, did you?"

"Well, yes and no," Colin explained. "I took your advice and stood in line day before yesterday and snagged me a job aboard *Titanic* as a printer's helper. Don't quite know what that is, but I've been getting acquainted with the ship all day. She is a beauty." Colin spoke with pride.

"Ho, ho, I know what that means mate. My name's Jacob and I've been on board since Belfast." Jacob shook hands with Colin. "A printer's helper is just that, a helper. Not only with the printing shop, but with the stewards and the laundry and the post, if you get the drift of my thinking now?"

Colin stood there with a questioning look.

"A jack of all trades?" Jacob hinted.

"A jackass, you mean?" Colin said and laughed. "Oh, well. It's only for a little while and then we shall port in New York City. I can manage 'til then."

"You'll have a fine time of it, a strapping young lad like you. Welcome aboard. You said you got all settled in then? We shove off in two days." Jacob pointed at a case in Colin's hand.

"What's that you're carrying?"

"It's my violin. I sing and play here, been doing it for a couple of years now to help keep a roof over our heads. Waiting for my ship to come in and give me good fortune. I've always wanted to play on a ship but have never been fortunate enough to obtain employment with an outgoing ship. So after a bit, I will come back and share my good fortunes with you. But alas, my audience awaits."

Colin took his violin out of the case and started to pluck it, tuning until the strings sounded good to him. He started playing a slow soft ballad that suddenly turned into a rowdy dirty little ditty about the barkeep's wife. Singing and waltzing from table to table, he looked and sounded like he had the whole world in his hands, like he was having a party just for himself. Lucas clapped and jiggled his leg in time, and even Jacob seemed to forget his troubles as Colin played. The more Colin played and sang, the louder and drunker the crowd became, singing and clapping

as if they wouldn't let him go there by himself. Smiles and laughter rose out of Donovan's. It was quite the scene, Lucas marveled, and Colin had created it all himself.

Jacob smiled and turned back to Lucas. "Your friend is very good. Seems a very likable chap. I look forward to spending a little time with him here and on board. As to your proposal, I've given it some quick thought and, by Jove, I like it. It has a much better chance of succeeding with you on board than any other I have come upon. I shall volunteer to help load and unload the sacks of mail. They most likely will have me doing some extra jobs. I might as well ask for one that I want. I'm usually not needed unless something goes wrong. Then I am called. Let me get the gears in motion, and if you happen to see me that evening at the docking at Cherbourg, just treat me like any other mate you have been friendly with. Have an extra mail sack ready to hand me and be ready to help with Alexandria. I told her to wear a red scarf to help identify her. I hope she won't mind hiding in a sack until we get on board. There we might have a wee bit of trouble. Help me look for her also. Thank you, thank you from the bottom of my heart. It feels as if a huge weight has been lifted off my chest. I have a small space to hide her while I search for somewhere else that she may claim an unclaimed berth." Jacob smiled again. "Thank you."

"But you can't tell my secret either," Lucas warned his friend. "If things don't work out with the filly, I might use the same method to hop off."

Jacob made a locking motion with his fingers across his lips. "My lips are sealed."

Jacob and Lucas turned to watch Colin again, their minds whirling as they listened to the wonderful sound of Colin's voice in harmony with some of the other people in the pub. A love song it was this time. Sitting before Colin, a young woman softly cried.

ALEXANDRIA SURVEYED HER mother's apartment. Boxes half filled with clothes and knick-knacks waited to be moved into one room. She would do that tonight. She had to go to visit her mother today. Alexandria hated going to the sanatorium. She couldn't even call it a hospital. Hospitals were for the living and breathing, and she wasn't sure her mother qualified anymore. It was considered a good place, the best that Mama's old benefactor could afford, but still the smell was so awful she had to wrap her face in a cloth bathed in lemon juice with a hint of spearmint, in order to be able to stand it. She'd learned early on only to visit during the lighted hours. The screaming in the middle of the day was enough to unnerve her. She couldn't imagine her fears once the dark set in.

She had to talk to her mother and it couldn't wait until tomorrow. This was the last day she would be welcome here. The apartment had been sold. She read the telegram again.

**Landing in Cherbourg *Titanic* ship Ten April at 730 pm Stop Join me Going to America Stop Pack Light Wear Red scarf Stop Jacob Darcy**

She needed to ask her mother all these questions while she was still able to answer. She put the telegram in her purse and went into the other room to change into something more appropriate for the sanatorium. She would go right away and then come back to pack up the rest of the apartment.



“MAMA, ARE YOU awake?” Alexandria asked, pausing to listen for a sound before she entered her mother’s room. She heard nothing so she peeked in and breathed a sigh of relief at seeing her mother sitting up. She breezed in and opened the curtains. “There now, this room needs some sunshine to lighten it up.” She turned and watched her mother’s eyes squint in the bright sunlight. “This sunshine will be good for those plants,” Alexandria said.

“How are you feeling today, Mama?” She was trying to put on a happy persona, though she didn’t feel it inside. “Would you like to go outside and sit and talk?” Alexandria looked at her expectantly. It was good that Mama was dressed and in her wheelchair already. A nod came from her mother. “All right, let’s get you into a shawl so your arms are covered and I’ll push you out.”

“My daughter,” Marchant’e said, slumped in her wooden wheelchair. “I’m glad you came to see me. I have much to say to you. I can feel it in my soul that I am dying.” She coughed and whispered the last words, then spit into a rag.

“Mama, you say that every time I see you. We are all dying in one way or another, aren’t we? Your body has chosen sooner rather than later.” Alexandria pushed her out the door and stopped by a bench beneath a big fig tree. Alexandria parked the chair by the bench and sat down. The landscape was lovely. There were green mounds with oak and fig trees scattered about.

“I received a telegram, Mama. It was addressed to me from Jacob Darcy. Yes, I recognize the name from all your stories. I’ll read it to you.” She read the telegram, and a smile crossed her mother’s face.

“Yes. My goodness, it came so quickly,” Mama said.

“You knew about this? Did you write to him?”

“Yes, of course I did. You should go with him. This is the answer to my prayers.” Mama broke off to cough. “You must go with him. There is nothing here for you, except me. This is all I can ask of both of you.” A hacking stream of coughing followed. “Oh, I remember him. It was a warm day in Belfast and I met a nice boy. I swear we fell in love in that moment. Because of that love, you were created.” She commenced to cough again. “I never told him about you until now. It’s good that he will take care of you. He can show you the life you were meant to live. I have given all I could to you, but now I can rest knowing that you will be safe. Yes, of course you should go. That is why I wrote him, telling him that I would not be alive in the near future. Go, live your life. Your destiny is not here.” Her breathing was labored. Harsh, raspy air escaped her mouth, and a slight moan with every breath accompanied each sentence.

“There is a sock hidden amongst my undergarments that has a little money in it. Use it to answer Jacob that you will be joining him. Take any of my things you wish. I’ll never be able to wear them again. Albert gave me such fine things. You must take as many of my valuables with you as you can. I love you, always remember that.”

Alexandria thought she had nothing left to cry for Mama, but she found her cheeks bathed in tears. Even with the last of her strength, Mama was still taking care of her. “I love you too, Mama.”

“Now take me back in, please,” Mama said. “I’m getting a chill.”

ALEXANDRIA LOOKED AROUND the apartment she had called home for many years. Her mother had somewhat exotic tastes, a little too much so for Alexandria. Leopard skin rugs and lounging couches, with round, long pillows on them. The pictures on the walls were of jungles in Africa, she presumed.

She continued her task of sorting through Mama's possessions. She couldn't take everything, and all that was left would be sold to pay the bills. Sorting through Mama's things was rather gruesome. She was not even dead, and here Alexandria was trying to tie everything up pretty in a bow. But again, what choice did she have?

Alexandria stared at some of the gowns she found. Despite her taste in décor, Mama had excellent taste in clothing. Why did she never know this about her mother? Every time Alexandria had come home from boarding school, they never went out on the town. They mostly stayed in, enjoying each other's company so much it left little time for other socialization.

Alexandria held up a gown. She and Mama were close to the same size. She packed four of the more tempting ones and left the rest. She found jewelry and cuffs, furs and coats, enough to keep herself warm and adorned on a cold night.

But it was the shoes that caught Alexandria's eye the most. She had never seen such a wonderful assortment of shoes. She started packing what she could take in her carpetbags. She didn't take the time to try anything on. The telegram didn't say that passage was booked, but Alexandria was not concerned. She wanted to be prepared for anything on the ship. For that matter, she needed to be prepared for the rest of her life. If he wished for her company, he should pay her passage for the pleasure of it. It was a good thing she had a red scarf, since she had no funds to buy one. But how would she recognize him?

She knew next to nothing about this man except the story of Mama's misplaced youth. Have faith, Mama always said. After all the time that had passed, she would have thought the story would change. It never did. Should she believe because Mama believed? Again, she asked herself, what choice did she have?

She would pack and meet up with this man, this father, but that didn't mean she would go with him, wherever he went. She would love to go to New York City, in America. They had the greatest music in America. But London would be fine, if that was where the ship went. She could get off the ship there if she didn't like her father. Someday, she thought, Cherbourg would be a great place to be from.

She would answer him. She went down to the telegraph office. She hurried, slipped on the cobblestone, and her heel got caught between the stones. When she finally got into the front office of the telegraph station, she was a disheveled woman. She held the heel of her shoe in her left hand, and her stockings were ruined. On top of that, it had started sprinkling. As she glared into the sky she exclaimed, "Oh how I loathe the rain."

She hobbled to the window with her telegram in hand. It read:

**To: Jacob Darcy Stop Mama near death Stop No hope of recovery Stop Will meet you at docks in Cherbourg wearing red scarf Stop Alex**

There, she had done it and it was off to the ship, *Titanic*. She used the last of the money she found in the sock. There was so much more to be done and so little time left in which to do it. Broken shoe in hand, she could only pray that her Mama's shoes fit. They were now the only shoes she had.

# Chapter Six

## 09 April 1912 — Southampton

THE DRIVER MANEUVERED the shiny black Rolls Royce onto the pier and stopped at the offices of The White Star Line. He got out and opened the back door. Alice stepped out, followed by Frances. They were both dressed in the latest fashions. Alice had on a blue and white striped shirttail top with the long sleeves gathered at the wrist with a matching, flowing skirt that gave her freedom to walk. Frances had chosen a white, ruffled blouse with a cameo at her neck, striking against the black material of her skirt. They wore large brimmed hats with wide ribbons cascading down their backs. Frances had chosen a white ribbon for her hat to show the contrast of black and white on her hair. Alice wished her hair shone as brightly in the sun as Frances's did, but her ribbon stood out with its striped layers against the straw of her hat.

They walked into the ticket offices of the White Star Line. Alice was expecting a man to help her with the tickets and her step faltered a bit when she saw a woman standing at the counter. Frances ran into the back of her. Alice saw a striking young woman in a large White Star Line hat. A beautiful woman in charge of the office, well, it threw Alice into a nervous frenzy. It was much like seeing a man in uniform did to some women. Her heartbeat pattered a little faster as she smiled and approached the window.

"Hello, yes, my name is Alice Pearce and this is my, uh, friend, Frances Cheswick. Her father is Fletcher Cheswick, and we are here to pick up some sort of packet to be reviewed and something done with it before sailing tomorrow." Alice stopped when she heard the odd inflection in her voice. She needed a moment to regain her composure. She took a deep breath.

"How do you do?" Alice had this line down pat. "I'll start over. My name is Alice Pearce and we have come to retrieve the tickets I assume were ready yesterday, when I had scheduled out a time to come on this particular errand, but no, someone else didn't want to. I had to drag her here. Frances, say hello to, I'm sorry, what is your name, miss? I can see from your nametag that your name is Mahoney." She spelled out the name. "But what shall I call you? Using your last name sounds inappropriate."

"I am, um, I mean, oh, Megan Mahoney at your service miss," Megan replied. "I'll go get that packet. It's in the back safe. When you didn't show up yesterday, I put it back there."

Alice glared at Frances as Megan turned to leave. Frances looked sheepish.

"Okay, here we are." Megan shook out the contents onto the counter for them to go over together. "Here are all four boarding passes. This is what you will need to get on board *Titanic*. These are for your personal luggage, distinguishing them from these." Megan showed a different tag. "This one is for deep storage, for things that should not need to be disturbed, for it is stored in the bottom of the ship and it would be very difficult to get to one particular trunk or box, mind you. The stewards on board are not to be sent on a wild goose chase for a bag you, yourself, have misrepresented."

Alice tried to concentrate, while watching Megan's fingers flit from one document to the next.

“So as I was saying, this is really all you need to attain passage as long as you have your possessions well marked. I usually send out these packets in the post,” Megan said. “Everything really explains itself. I thought I’d give a little extra touch for you. I’m not sure why.”

“It’s because Daddy thinks he could control me better on a ship than in his own back yard. I can’t help it that the backyard is a hundred acres thick,” Frances Cheswick stated as if everyone should be listening to her even if they were not. “With lots of hiding places and lots and lots of friends to share it with. So what if we stay out a little bit too late, or come into the estate in not quite the regular way? He thinks I will be easier to keep track of, that’s why we are going on this holiday to the States. We were asked not to return to the Canary Islands this season because of his outrageous conduct.”

“His conduct?” Alice asked.

“Well, I think he is jumping at this chance to rein me in and make sure I am at dinner every night and that I am meeting the proper gentlemen. Father is such a liar. I must marry money and now, to top it all off, I have to stay in the same room as them. Oh, Alice, you are so lucky to get to go down to Second Class and get away from all of this.” She whirled around.

Alice cut her off. “It is not proper to gossip, especially around someone we have just met, you do know that, don’t you Franny? We are here to pick up our packets from this lovely woman named Megan Mahoney.” Alice turned back to the counter. “Is that Honey with a long O or honey, like it drips from the hive?” Ever so slightly Alice’s tongue made its way to the front of her mouth. Her lips puckered. She hoped her eyes twinkled. She smiled.

“Here you go then,” Megan said. “Take these to Mr. Cheswick. Have him sign here and here, then here and here, initial here and here. Please make sure everyone has their boarding passes to get on board. Bon Voyage and all that.”

Megan seemed nervous, which made Alice smile.

Megan gathered the papers and stacked them in a pile. “And this is where Mrs. Cheswick signs, and then Miss Frances will sign here. Your signature, Miss Pearce, is not required as you will be listed on the registration of the Second Class log and will need to sign in on that log. But these are the Second Class vouchers for you and luggage tags, and further on in this packet it explains how one gets about the ship with a helpful diagram showing your location and the name of the rooms occupied, as well as your deck, cabin and berth compartment. It was a pleasure meeting both of you.” Megan wistfully sighed. “Have a wonderful time. Part of me wants to join you on this grand voyage.”

“That would be very lovely,” Alice replied. “It would be so nice to pass the voyage with someone of my own age, if I am guessing yours correctly. And Franny here could always use a new friend. She runs through them every season and then wonders why she has nothing to do. If they just got to know her the way I know her. But before she feels comfortable unveiling her true self, she feels she has to be right all the time. She never bends, nor takes suggestions. Oh, now listen to me. It was a pleasure to be helped by someone as gracious as yourself, Miss Megan Mahoney. I do wish you could join us. I’m sure we could become the best of friends. I just get this feeling about you. Goodbye.” She reached out to touch Megan’s hands but stopped herself and patted her own hair instead. She wiggled her fingers at Megan. “Goodbye.”

FRANCES WATCHED THE exchange between the women.

Well now, what do we have here? Frances thought. Alice seems to want to conquer another before setting sail. The young woman at the counter could be pretty, Frances supposed, if she took down the hair she had hiding under her cap and wore some different clothes. She might pass as someone who could delight Alice for a while.

Just look at them. Conversing back and forth, the ha ha, hee hee Frances had to listen to. Oh, she couldn't take it anymore. She saw the women Alice went out with. They came and went off the property in the wee early mornings. Alice thought no one knew, but Frances knew. An array of women had come and gone in those wee hours, handsome, beautiful women of every stature and size.

Why didn't Alice ever look in her own backyard? Why wouldn't she take a look at someone like Frances? If only Frances could get the greeting Alice gave so many other women, this woman, the slight eyebrow rise and the signature smile. Frances loved to hear that mischievous laughter coming from deep within Alice after hearing a joke or two, even if it hadn't been directed at her.

Alice always had it so easy. She didn't have to dance with all the young men with wandering hands, or try so hard to find a match. A match. What did that mean anyway? In most of the marriages Frances knew, the gentleman had someone on the side and so did the wife. That's what marriage meant to her. But how about a match that burned brightly only for her? Was it really too much to ask for the admiration from the one she also admired?

Maybe they could have a chance on this voyage. They could walk arm in arm on the promenade deck, strolling with their parasols. It was such a lovely picture. Frances shook her head and tried to refocus on the conversation at hand. What was this? Alice was asking the woman to join her on board? And what was that stuff about honey? It all but dripped from Alice's mouth.

"Alice, come on now," Frances said. "Just get the tickets and let's leave. There was this darling hat in the window on the corner that I must have before the trip in the morning, so let's go." Frances nodded toward Megan. "It was nice to meet you and everything, but we must be leaving. There is so much to do in so little time."

Even as Frances practically dragged her from the ticket office and Miss Mahoney, Alice turned around and gave a little wave goodbye.

"Lovely, lovely woman," Alice sighed.

OH LORD, MEGAN thought. Did she really just lose her composure like that? That had never happened to her before. It was just two women. They seemed such normal people, for being so rich. Okay, not Alice, of course, but that Frances.

A spoiled little brat, but a real beauty all the same. It was Alice who got her attention, though, throwing out those cute flirty things at her last name. Oh Megan had caught it. She was just not quite sure what to do about it. Megan had always secretly wanted some good friends of her own, but the women in town were all off being married and all. The close friendship she had observed with those two that had just come in was, well, special to see. They acted like family to each other. If only she knew of a way to be part of such a friendship.

Wait a minute. She did have the power to create chance meetings. She could select a berth for herself near Alice. 'Tis only for a few days at sea.

She quickly made up her mind. The cabin in which Alice was located was a four-berth cabin. Megan wondered if any of the other berths were unoccupied. Frances's cabin was Deck B, Suites 45 and 45A and Alice's was Deck D, Cabin 22, berth 1. A quick check confirmed that Alice had no roommates yet. Megan would put herself in Deck D, Cabin 22, berth 4. That way they could trade if need be, in case Alice wanted the lower bunk. Megan could gain Alice's confidence by trying to do things her way, for her. Megan would need a friend on this voyage. Someone other than her brother. Alice thought she was the same age as Megan, but Megan thought Alice seemed a little younger. Based on her airs and her dress, though, she was probably wiser and certainly worldlier than Megan could ever think of being. Megan just needed a friend to show her the ropes in a foreign country. Yes, that would be nice. She would need a friend.

Megan checked to make sure no one was about. All right, she pulled out all the proper paperwork that went with Ticket No. 242154. Now that she had a deck, cabin and berth location for this number, she was ready. She had her luggage tags properly identified, boarding pass already complete, and immigration papers in order.

It was really happening. Yes, yes, it was. Tomorrow was a big day.

# Chapter Seven

## 10 April 1912 — Southampton

THE MORNING OF the maiden voyage was chaotic, just as Megan thought it would be. Trains arriving full, full of people and their luggage, filled to the gills, and unloading onto the pier.

Megan must have passed at least twenty piles of goods and two automobiles being loaded onto a crane before she came to the back door of the office. The day had an unusual feel to it. It was like the ship herself was excited to depart.

Inside the office, the day felt as usual. Megan started the day the same as always. Cecil wasn't coming in until after lunch that day. She turned on the electric lights, opened the safe, got out her cash drawer, and locked it into place on the front counter. Then she grabbed the key hanging above the safe and unlocked the ornate cage doors hanging over the counter, but closed them shut so they appeared locked without actually being locked. Next she replenished the document case. If something went wrong and she had to return tomorrow, at least everything else would be ready for the day to begin.

And what a day this would be. Her life would definitely be different in twelve hours. The excitement rushed through Megan's veins as if the blood was running in all different directions, swimming inside and radiating outwardly.

All right Megs, let's open up as if it was a regular day. Which she supposed it was, one last time. Megan stood by the doorway, pausing to get onto her tiptoes to see. Bedlam had broken out on the pier. *Titanic* stood proud with her gangplanks in full use. First Class passengers went up one gangplank while the other planks led passengers onto different decks of the ship, from E to A decks. Aye, she looked more beautiful with all the people clamoring onboard, all the hustle and bustle.

Megan was astonished by the sights and sounds. Even dogs on their leads walking up the gangplanks with their masters, man servants, mistresses or maids in tow, their heads held high, flaunted the fact that they were the chosen ones, as if on parade. Porters followed with loaded baggage carts, some piled so high it took two porters for one family. A band was playing. Megan could hear the music, but she couldn't figure out where the band was located. It was a nice blend of old and new music. She heard a new ragtime song. Catchy.

Could the time drag any slower? The pier was becoming more and more crowded. She wished the time would go faster. Eleven o'clock could not come soon enough.

When the eleven o'clock hour finally did come, Megan hung the "out to lunch" sign and removed her cash drawer for the very last time. Elation filled her down to her toes. She left a note in her drawer for Cecil to find when he had his shift after lunch, explaining that she was abandoning her post and could be found through her family. She also explained that the safe was locked and the keys to everything were left in the top middle drawer of the desk.

All right then. This was it. Megan turned around to gaze over the little office that had been a home to her for the last three years. With luck, she would never see it again.

Megan made sure that the lights were out and double-checked that the “out to lunch” sign hung on the door. “Very befitting,” Megan said zealously. She grabbed her bag and luggage cart and went out the back door. Megan stopped to adjust her new hat. It was the very same hat from down the pier that Frances had boasted about but hadn’t bought. There appeared to be hundreds of people, all trying to board at the same time. Megan was in awe. With a smile on her face, she took her first step toward freedom. *Titanic*.

A porter stopped her on the dock. “Here there, miss.” He gestured at her luggage cart. “Let me take care of this for you. I see it is all properly marked for storage so move along with you. Go on, up this ramp then.” He hustled her onto the Second Class ramp leading into the ship.

Megan stopped just before the gangway to look at her life now being loaded into the ship. Her trunk was distinguishable, at least to her. It used to be her ma’s. When she passed, God rest her soul, it was Megan’s. There wasn’t anything fancy to it, like a humpback steamer trunk, but it was pretty, with a flat top highly shellacked with wooded teak cross beams and carvings in the leather between the slats. It was pretty. Inside were compartments and layers in which she stacked her belongings. Megan wondered if she should have grabbed her gold bracelet out of that bag in her trunk. That and her watch were the only truly valuable items she possessed. Goodbye, trunk. She wouldn’t see it again until New York. Have a safe voyage. She watched as a hydraulic lift folded the large nets around the trunks and hauled them into the storage holds of the ships. How clever, having the doors open right up in the hull. She looked slightly down the hull and was amazed to see all the mail bags being loaded. Gracious, there must be ten to twenty bags full of mail and packages with each crane lift. She was glad she didn’t have to work it. She did feel sorry for those clerks on board. It must be a mess with all that mail and nowhere to sort it. With that, she turned to walk up the gangway and present the porter with her boarding pass. Megan’s stomach felt queasy, but on she walked.

All right then, hand the porter your ticket and boarding pass, she instructed herself. Keep your head slightly down under the brim of your fancy new hat so as not to be easily recognized. Politely murmur thank you, and move onto the ship. Okay.

“Excuse me, miss?” The porter stopped her. “You shouldn’t be at this gate. This is a Third Class ticket and your vouchers are for a Second Class berth. Oh, I have too much to do at the moment, so how about this, miss? I’ll let you in here and you go take this ticket down to the Third Class purser and give it to him. Is that clear, miss?”

“Yes sir, I can do that, sir. Yes sir, which way is that?” Megan stumbled over her words as she walked forward past the officer and onto the ship. Over her shoulder she glanced to where the man had pointed. That’s the way she went to get out of his sight and memory.

There now, turn left and through this doorway and turn right. Stop and catch breath. Whew. She had done it. No one was behind her and she did not recognize anyone around her. That was a good omen. Now she just had to remain unnoticed until the ship set sail, and then she would find her cabin and make do with the consequences.

She said goodbye to her homeland. She would never ever forget her or the people who were left behind. It was their choice to stay, as much as it was her choice to go.

“Goodbye, goodbye, Da. I love you,” she whispered.

It was like a huge party, but she only knew three people on board, if she counted Alice and Franny, and none of them were even aware that she was on board with them. She hoped it was a good surprise. Especially for her brother.

“Goodbye.” She felt that this would be the last time she would ever see all of them.



COLIN PAUSED AT the crew quarters' deck hatch and peered out as the ship filled with passengers. "See here, my friends." He looked back into the hull. "There's much to be looked upon. Have a look and see. Lucas? Jacob?" Both men came to join him.

"Do you see what I see, me mates?" Jacob asked. "I never thought I'd see so many people from so many places congregating in one spot to board this ship. 'Tis bloody amazing. I've already counted four dogs. One woman even matched her coat with the dog, or vice versa you know. Very sparkly, the both of them were. There were a couple of automobiles brought on board too, and so much luggage."

"Aye, I've seen it," said Colin. "I have been hauling baggage for First Class passengers all morning. Why did you think I was wearing this white monkey suit if I didn't have to?"

Jacob laughed loudly. "Well, we was wondering."

"People travel with the strangest stuff. Boy, does this palace on water shine, though," Colin said. He noticed, out of the corner of his eye, a young woman hurrying along the gangplank. She had dark red hair and wore a purple hat. She reminded him of Megan in the way she walked. He would miss the lass. The way she was always up for an adventure. Whether it was pirates playing in the water at the cove, or when they sang together at Donovan's. They were a great match as far as trust was concerned. He would miss her. He started his descent toward the doorway.

"Well, rightly so, I have to get back to work then, mates. Loading and toting my way to America. It is not very difficult to understand the configurations of the ship or even as difficult as learning the Irish Waltz in E Flat for that matter. Just hard backbreaking work for these hoity-toity folks, but 'tis a job and more is to come my way in seven days. It will all be all over in a little bit."

It would be just a moment in time, actually. "Best get back at it. Those tips won't fly into my pocket all on their own," Colin said. He bade goodbye to his mates with a hearty, "See you in a couple of hours for dinner and a pint in the Third Class dining room then, say you?"

Colin walked along the corridor that ran the length of the ship. It was called Scotland Yard, he'd heard. It really helped with the delivery of the baggage. It was like the spine of the ship that had many stairways and halls that led off to different areas.

He whistled as he made his way to A Deck to obtain his next orders. It's going to be a grand few days at sea. He smiled to himself. It was almost noon.

ALICE HAD HER arms full, barely able to see around them. The family walked in a line and she brought up the rear. She heard Fletcher say, "Come along, my dears. We must make time. Frances, will you please go on with your walking toward the ship instead of peeking in all the pier shop windows and join us as we walk the gangway. Please."

Fletcher Cheswick seemed to be at his wit's end. He should have known this wasn't going to get easier the older she got, Alice thought. Was she the only one who realized what a challenge Frances had become?

"Come along then, Helene, we mustn't hold up traffic on the gangplank. Coming then, Alice?" Fletcher was almost the first on the gangplank until he thrust Helene in front of him, then moved her along with his body shadowing her every move.

Alice followed with her arms full of three hatboxes and a dress bag draped over her arm, trying to walk up the plank without spilling her contents into the sea. Frances grabbed the top hatbox. About time, Alice thought. It was hers anyway.

Frances smiled at Alice. "Isn't this grand?" No, Alice thought, it wasn't. A man in a blue suit and hat approached them. "Are you the Cheswicks?" the man asked. Fletcher nodded.

"This way then. My name is Hemsley, Porter Hemsley. I am to be your personal guide. Allow me to show you to your stateroom." He led them to the elevator and took them up to B deck. He then guided them to their stateroom.

The room was large and decorated with brocade wallpaper and gleaming wood accents. One double bed sat in a corner and another smaller bed occupied the other side with a mirrored sitting table between them. The sitting room had a settee and table with four chairs and a beautiful bouquet of fresh flowers that filled the room with their fragrance.

Fletcher said, "This is all that was left on the ship three days before sailing. I am sorry, Frances, that and you and Alice cannot be together. It's just for a little while and then we shall be all together again in New York. Let's make the best of things, shall we?"

Alice felt like a maid of sorts, but there were benefits to the role. She didn't get to be with the family, but she would be free to be herself, and be by herself, with no one constantly supervising her. That would be nice.

"Here you go my good man." Fletcher handed Hemsley a ten pound note, twirled around and pointed at Alice.

"And the young lady's accommodations?"

Hemsley replied, "If that is all, sir, I shall escort the young woman down to her Second Class accommodations. But this is completely against regulations," he said. "Second Class passengers are usually left to their own devices. But, all in all." He glanced down at the note in his hand and said, "Come along miss."

He started to grab Alice's elbow, but she sidestepped him and turned to Frances. "Let's meet on the promenade deck, starboard side for the send off. Half an hour you say? I think I can be back by then. Wait." She turned to Hemsley. "Why can't you just come back here after the ship has sailed to fetch me to go to my berth? What say you?" She waited a moment. "Please."

"Right, then, I'll go and find others that need my assistance. I will come back and check on things later then." Hemsley carried himself off in a totally opposite direction, pocketing the ten spot as he walked away. Alice suspected she wouldn't see him again. No matter. She really just wanted to watch the launch. She would find her own way to her cabin later, just like the rest of the Second Class passengers.

Alice turned to Frances and said, "Let's go and wave to the people on the shore. It will be a while before we shall see your homeland again."

THE WESTBROOKES ARRIVED at the station in plenty of time for the launch. Emily noticed the Cheswicks' tan, two-toned Rolls Royce, two cars back. "My, my, my, the plot thickens." Thank God she'd had to turn around to talk to Ethan. She would not have even noticed the Cheswicks if Ethan hadn't been blabbering on about some gentleman he wished was sailing with him. Her mind must have been wandering because she was so caught up in her surprise. She saw them, all of them, just to the right of his shoulder. She'd had no idea that they would actually take up her brother's offer and join them. She'd thought it was just party talk. Now to find out

they were here, it certainly changed the scenery. This trip was going to be even more delicious than she had originally thought.

Alice and Frances climbed out of the first car. They didn't really resemble one another, did they? Hmm, how exciting to have both of them on this beautiful, huge ship, without too many restraints. Really, where could they go? There was Alice. Such delights that woman gave Emily at the tea and in the garden, and almost again in the cloakroom at the Sterling affair. What a voyage this has become. *Titanic* was a ship of dreams. Emily's were already coming true.

"Come along Ethan." Emily flagged down a porter, gave him a ten dollar piece, and pointed to the pile of two trunks and three bags, all clearly marked for storage.

"I shall keep this one with me in our suite. Ethan, come along." Emily started walking along the pier to their gangplank. "Let's go up to the First Class promenade deck and wave goodbye to a gracious country. I know I had fun. We have received so many new prospects for business in the coming year and more with crossings of the Atlantic becoming faster and more luxurious with each ship. Westbrooke Shipping will do well in the coming years. I'm glad we came on this voyage. Stand tall, my brother, for you are a Westbrooke. Maybe your boyfriend is down there waving goodbye to you. With you at the helm and me doing everything else that needs to be done, Westbrooke Shipping will be unsinkable," she said, borrowing the new cliché of *Titanic*.

They entered the ship through the First Class gangplank. "Here," Emily said. "Here is a nice view of the people on the dock waving at us. Let's stand toward the bow, by a railing and wave back. They seem very excited for us to go. No more, I suppose, than I am to leave. Come on."

More and more passengers were coming aboard, starting to form rows along the rail going three deep. The excitement filling the air was almost too much. Never before had Emily seen so many passengers making a spectacle of the launching of a ship. People were laughing and crying, waving and singing, and even dancing. The excitement rose from steerage up to the D deck and beyond.

Emily's eye caught a twinkle. She turned to her right and it flashed again. It was a mirrored piece on a young woman's hat. Well, isn't this nice? It was Alice. Emily smiled. It was kismet, it must be. It was only a five- to seven-day voyage or less, if the boasts of speed were accurate. It was so little time. She might as well get started. She let her gaze fall heavily on Alice.

Finally Alice looked over and caught Emily staring at her. Her eyes popped and Emily saw her give a gasp, just a little one, like the one Emily had heard that night, just barely audible. Alice smiled, shyly, almost demure. Good enough.

Emily threw her a wink and smiled seductively. She turned around to fully face the leaving pier and heard the snap of lines breaking. A nearby ship broke from its moorings from the waves created by the moving *Titanic*. She could read the name of the ship, *New York*, on its bow, they were that close. Following the starboard gunnels she could see the loose *New York* and the tugs bearing down on her. Emily thought the ship was on a crash course with them, and the maiden voyage of *Titanic* would be doomed before it even started. At the last moment, she felt a forward thrust in *Titanic*'s engines. The *New York* went safely behind them as they started bearing toward open sea. Emily linked her arm with Ethan's and started waving. All in a dignified way, of course. She was a Westbrooke, after all.

# Chapter Eight

## 10 April 1912 — Launch Day

AS THE SHIP started to pick up speed on the open water, Megan decided it was time to go find her cabin. She hadn't seen hide nor hair of her brother, thank the Lord. The major hustle and bustle that had energized the passengers at the very beginning of movement from shore had come to a close. People running along the pier waving and shouting simply ran out of pier.

They were on their way. It was only a little after one o'clock. She thought she would stroll around the decks and breathe in the calming atmosphere, not the frantic goodbye scenes that she'd had to endure a bit ago.

A tuxedo-clad man opened a door to an airy tiled hall with small tables and a few brocade chairs. They did know how to make one feel like royalty. She wondered if there were any on board. Royalty, that is. She sidestepped several groups of people and soon found herself on a magnificent staircase that led off into two directions. There were small golden cherubs with wings at the bottom of the staircase. A delicately placed golden ribbon wound around the cherubs' bodies. She moved to the other side of the staircase and discovered an elevator. The young man who ran it said that he had been so very busy, but she could come back and ride with him up and down if she wanted to. He smiled and wiggled his eyebrows at her, and she laughed. She was used to that sort of behavior from talk at the pub.

A group of young children raced around a corner yelling at one another, running like the wind. She felt their excitement and was nearly tempted to join them. A smile crossed her face. She was happy. No, she was ecstatic. Beyond free. She felt no sadness here. She had taken the chance, she had leaped the leap and now, here she was, on board this magnificent ship on her way to meet her new life and make new friends in a new country with adventures she would create herself. *Titanic*, you are a ship of dreams.

With her arms spread wide, Megan made a wide circle, but stopped abruptly when her fingers grazed another woman's hat.

"I'm so terribly sorry. I shall watch where I do that from now on," Megan mumbled, catching her breath as her eyes were penetrated by the intense blue irises staring at her from under her hat. The woman wore a seductive smile. It made Megan wonder. Did the woman mean something in particular with that smile, or did she look at everyone that intensely? Megan hurried to catch the open door that led to a foyer before it closed.

ALICE FOLLOWED THE hallway marked Cabins 10-25 after she got out of the elevator on Deck D. She looked down the long hallway and saw doorknobs sticking out of the little alcoves for the doorways. The gleaming wood was still apparent throughout the hallway of the Second Class wing. Wainscoting lay underneath the handrails on each side of the hallway. She followed them until she reached her cabin.

She entered and stood in the middle of the room and assessed the place. There were bunk beds on each side, attached to the wall. Two sets, an upper and a lower.

With luck she wouldn't get a roommate. It didn't appear as if anyone else had arrived. Alice decided to sleep on the lower bunk and use the upper for her bags and things. She sat on the bunk and glanced about the room. It was a very efficient use of space. She especially liked the dressing table that was fastened to the floor and the sink that was secured to the wall by anchors. It had the same wallpaper as upstairs, the same gleaming wood accents, but it didn't quite have the luxurious feeling.

It wasn't at all as nice as the Cheswicks', even if Frances did have to share with her mother and father. Alice supposed she was lucky she got placed down here in Second Class at all, with it being last minute. It was a lot more compact than the First Class rooms. She took a deep breath, exhaled, and yawned deeply.

She needed to rest her eyes for a moment. No one would miss her. Alice settled back with her head on the edge of the pillow and sighed. Her feet were still on the floor, feeling the low rumbling of the engines, far away in some unknown part of the ship. She could feel the chugging of the propellers through the water taking them, eventually, to America. What a lovely holiday it would be.

Should she be more excited about seeing her homeland? She hadn't set foot on American soil for over a decade now. It made her wonder if she would feel like an American or if she had changed so much that she was an English woman now. She swung her legs around to rest them on the bed. She almost whimpered, it felt so good. She should have removed her shoes. It felt nice. Quiet even. The engines underneath were lulling and thrumming back and forth, side to side.

She had just fallen asleep when the door of the cabin banged open and a woman in a large purple hat with a white plume stepped into the room.

"Oh my, but this is a splendid room. Very efficient. Huh. I did put us up well, don't you think?" the woman asked earnestly.

Alice sat up, startled. She stared at the woman, trying to place where she had seen her. She remembered the face. It was a beautiful one. But where...

The woman spoke again. "How do you do. I'm Megan Mahoney, in case you don't remember. Do you remember? The White Star Line Ticket office? I helped you with your tickets, you and the Cheswicks?

Beautiful Frances? Err, Southampton?"

Alice felt her hand being grasped and pumped like it was a water spigot. She supposed it was a handshake.

Megan said, "I say, it's all right if you don't remember. I didn't mean to scare you like I have. I'm sorry. I just remember a lot of odd things, and people's faces are one of them. I was just really glad to see a face I knew in all this sea of strangers. May I put my bags up here, if that be all right?"

Alice nodded. She still hadn't let go of Megan's hand. Flustered, she released it, and motioned that it was fine to put her bags on the upper bunk opposite Alice's.

"So, after you and Frances left my office it started me to thinking. Hey, what about me? I mean, I could use a holiday too. No, I deserve a holiday. Why not *Titanic*? I looked and saw that the cabin I put you in met all my needs and so I placed myself in here with you. I hope I didn't overstep my boundaries, but I couldn't leave our meeting on board again to chance. I needed to control it a little. If this arrangement isn't to your liking, then we shall find me another suitable

room. I took it to heart when you said we could be friends. I could certainly use a friend on board, like you and Frances. That's why I chose you. You seemed to have such a special relationship. I want to have that kind of friendship like you and Frances have. The fun, the bickering, like family. Special," Megan said brightly.

"Oh, I should think not. No, not at all." Alice got up quickly. How could this strange woman think that she and Franny had that sort of intimate relationship? "Franny and I are not, no, no, I can't even begin to explain it to you, but Franny and I certainly do not have a relationship like you describe. She is like my little sister."

With that, Alice swept out of the room and down the hall. She hesitated just outside the door to the promenade deck, then pushed forward and swept through the doors and stood thinking about what had just transpired.

A fresh breeze cooled her hot cheeks. Megan Mahoney was here. That beautiful clerk that she had haphazardly asked if she wanted to join them. Flirting was what she had done. Was that so bad? No, once again it showed she had good taste in women. But to be taken up like that, after her casual words, was a shock. A pleasant shock, though, now that its freshness wore off a bit. She could think about a special relationship with that one. She took a deep breath to regain her composure and returned to the cabin.

"Oh dear me," Alice said. "I always get so flustered and then I run. Now I'm back to start once again. Miss Mahoney, how good it is to see you again. Yes, in answer to your question, I do remember you and would be delighted to work on that close special relationship you were mentioning. These next few days with our own cabin and the whole ship to explore, I'm sure we will have a fabulous time discovering new places and getting to know each other. I am so glad you took me at my word and joined me. It did take me quite by surprise. And now that I am back, let me make some room for your things and then let's go find Frances. I am scheduled to meet her on the promenade deck in—oh, what time is it now? In just a few minutes. You are welcome to join us if you'd care to."

"Oh, yes, I surely would," Megan said, "but give me a little time to get my things sorted out and I'll catch up with you on the promenade deck."

"Meet us at the clock in twenty minutes. You know the one on the stairs. The carved one with two women on it gazing at each other adoringly. At least I think so. Nothing but time separates them. Anyway, meet us there."

"WE'LL BE BACK soon," Alice assured Fletcher and Helene. "We want to wave goodbye to England." She ushered Frances through the door and closed it behind them.

"Hurry up. We're going to be late. It's been over twenty minutes."

"So?" Frances asked. "England isn't going anywhere."

"Well, I made plans with my roommate to join us and we are late."

"A roommate?" Frances said suspiciously.

"Yes. You remember the woman who helped us with our accommodations at the White Star Line? Her name was Megan?"

"I remember her. You were all caught up in her name. Dripping like honey or something like that. Why?"

“Because that is who we are meeting,” Alice said. She tried not to act too excited. Frances had a tendency to get a little jealous when Alice made a new friend. “Come on. We’re meeting her by the clock. We passed it on our way to your cabin.”

Frances stopped. “Megan Mahoney is your roommate?”

“Yes, now come along. We mustn’t keep her waiting.” Alice noted the stubborn look on Frances’s face and tried to think of a way to entice her. “This will be fun, won’t it Frances? To have a third person to play with on our voyage?”

“I thought it would just be the two of us,” Frances said.

“Well, if two is good, then three will be better,” Alice said. “Now, come along please.”

They reached the top of the stairs and looked down to the landing. Alice’s heart bumped an extra beat as she watched Megan approach the clock and study it. Megan’s face took on an almost angelic appearance as she stared at the women in the clock and reached up to touch the ribbon covering them. Alice cleared her throat.

Megan looked up and a smile broke out on her face. She acted happy to see them. Alice was elated at the thought. “Megan, did you see what I was talking about when I mentioned the clock?”

Megan blushed.

Alice walked down the stairs to meet up with Megan. “You remember Frances, don’t you? Frances, what are you doing up there? Here, come down and meet Megan Mahoney again, properly this time.”

Frances walked down the stairs and took Megan’s hand, almost politely, and said, “Oh, yes, I remember you quite well. I thought you had a job? You certainly do look different though, with your hair down and all. But that hat? Wait a moment. That’s the hat from the window I was looking at, after we left your office. I didn’t buy it, but obviously you did. How funny that you like so many things I like. I can say that at least you have good taste.” Frances glanced over at Alice, then turned back to Megan, smiled and asked, “Why are you here?”

Alice glared over at her and answered, “Miss Mahoney is on holiday, same as us. Isn’t that marvelous?”

“Please, call me Megan, both of you.”

“All right, I’m Alice, and this is Frances.”

“Oh, I want to stay with you two. Are there any more bunks where you are?” Frances asked.

“Um, I’ll have to see,” Alice said. “Everyone is not on board yet. You should just stay where you are. You have much nicer accommodations than ours.”

They descended the stairs and went out onto the promenade deck. The crowds had dispersed and they had it nearly to themselves. Alice smiled and felt a glow of satisfaction as, being in the middle, she glanced back and forth between the two beautiful women. They started walking at a slow pace, each seemingly lost in her own thoughts, glancing out to the sea and beyond.

Frances, who was slight in build with long black hair that hung to her waist, truly was a contrast to Megan. Megan stood around five eight and carried herself in a manner that Alice could not quite describe. Maybe confidence would be a good word. Since she had let her reddish-brown hair down, it curled slightly around her face, with her cute, pert, vibrant green eyes peeking out.

You’re getting a little carried away, Alice scolded herself. She was just happy to be walking on this deck with both of them. No, she was beyond happy. The sea was calm. A slight breeze came off the bow, but other than that, it was perfect. She wished she had put on a warmer coat though.

Frances noticed a shiver had consumed Alice and linked her arm into hers. "There, there, you'll feel better in a bit," Frances said. They walked for a few more steps and went to lean on the railing and look out to sea.

"Aye, 'tis so calm out there you can see but a ripple on the horizon there." Megan pointed out towards the sea. She put her hands on the railing and leaned way back, holding herself with her arms on the railing. "So, what do you do on a holiday?" Megan asked. "I have never been on one before."

"You have never been on holiday?" Frances asked. "My Lord, such a dull life you have led. We do all sorts of things, depending on where we go. The last couple of years, we have gone to the Canary Islands. It's nice and warm there, with long beautiful beaches of taupe colored sand, lined with palm trees. It was exotic once, but we have gone back three times. I got in a little trouble the last time."

"That's putting it mildly," Alice said.

"Well, it's not my fault you all left me on that beach to make it back to our place by myself. I had to ask for help from someone, didn't I?"

"I suppose. But did it have to be that actress? It just made us look bad in front of the hotel staff, that's all," Alice said.

"Enough you two. Look about you. We are on the greatest ship in the whole world, and all you can do is bicker? You sound like my brother Colin and me at home after dinner. We need to figure out something to do that we will all enjoy. Oh, I know, let's go explore the gymnasium they have on board. Or, no, I've got a better idea than that. Let's go look at the swimming pool." With that, she headed toward the Palm Room and down a staircase.

"How does she know where she is going?" asked Frances as they hurried to follow her.

Alice replied, "It must be that she studied the floor plan so much when she was selling tickets for the White Star Line that she knows almost instinctively where everything is. I've talked to several porters, and they said they still get turned around on board, and they have been on ship for more than a week. She seems like a fun girl, don't you think Franny?"

"Yes, I suppose," Frances replied blandly. "It's only for a few days. I can put up with her for that long."

Alice frowned.

"I mean, yes," Frances said, "she is delightful."

"Hurry up or we shall lose her," Alice said.

"That would be fine with me," Frances said snidely, but she hurried anyway.

WELL, WELL, WELL, what do we have here? Emily wondered. Alice, the other little Cheswick girl, and another new friend to meet. Delightful. Their friend was quite nice looking too, she might add, and she looked a bit familiar. Of course, it was the exuberant girl who had slapped her hat earlier. What a trio they made. And one more makes four. Delightful, Emily thought.

Emily had been walking with Ethan when she spied the group up ahead of them, coming through the doorway. "You may leave now. Be a good boy and play nice with others." She patted him on his cheek to send him off.

He lit out of there like his pants were on fire. "You'll find me in the baths," he called over his shoulder, "or, more than likely, not 'til dinner."



Emily sat down on a deck chair and waited for the women to come closer. Like flies to a spider.

“Why, hello Alice,” she said smoothly when they reached her. “What a pleasant surprise to find you on board. I didn’t really expect to see you all here, but the more the merrier, I always say. Who are your lovely companions? Oh, I remember you. You are the little Cheswick girl, but I don’t remember your given name.” Emily looked at her expectantly.

“My name is Frances. We met the other night.”

“Oh, yes, that’s right. I’m sorry I forgot, Frances.” Smiling brightly, Emily turned toward the third woman.

“Megan Mahoney, ma’am. And you are?”

“Please forgive me. My name is Emily Westbrooke, of Westbrooke Shipping, Pennsylvania. I had the pleasure, I mean, the utmost pleasure of meeting Alice at a gathering at the Sterling Castle last week in Southampton. She seems to have left a very good impression on me, because I still remember it, and her, vividly.” Emily smiled brightly at Alice.

Alice’s face went a bit red.

“I hope I haven’t embarrassed you, Alice. That was not my intent. I’m sure it has to be the wind on your face. Here, let me give you my wrap.” She whipped her cloak from her shoulders and draped it over Alice. “There, is that better?”

“Yes.” Alice hugged the cloak tight across her bosom. “Oh, this is so warm from your own heat. Thank you.”

“So are we all having a smashing time on board this great ship?” Emily asked a little too loudly.

Alice was quick to answer. “Yes, yes, we have all been having a splendid afternoon going from deck to deck, admiring all the exquisite finery. We never made it to the pool as we had hoped, but tomorrow it will still be there. We also counted a lot of grand pianos. I wish one of us could play.” Alice laughed at her own joke.

“My brother can play. He is right good too,” Megan said. “Maybe someday you can hear for yourself. He is somewhere on board. I haven’t had time myself to go and find him. I’ll have time though. All week on board before I need to see him.” Megan’s voice dropped. “That would be fine with me.”

“That is so nice. Having a brother on board, that is,” Emily said. “I have one on board too. What is your brother’s name?”

“His name is Colin. And he is a fine musician. He plays a better violin than piano, to tell you the truth. He got a job on board as a printer’s helper. Lord knows what that is, but he is staying down on E deck. Maybe I’ll see him when I go find the mail room. He made a little rhyme about his cabin when he first got it. Let me think. Something about E9. That doesn’t make sense? Oh well, we shall find each other soon enough.”

Alice’s face was light with interest at Megan’s chatter, though there was nothing interesting in it, as far as Emily could tell. Who was this Megan?

“Are you of the working class too, then, like your brother?”

Megan laughed. “I’m between jobs right now, but I have been known to earn my keep.”

“How did you meet the Cheswicks?”

“She sold us our tickets,” Frances said.

“How interesting,” Emily said, though she found it anything but. She took Alice’s arm and slowed her pace so that they fell slightly behind the working girl and young Frances. “Forgive me for saying so, dear Alice, but I find you the most interesting of all.”

# Chapter Nine

## 10 April 1912 — Launch Day

COLIN SAT WITH his mates at one of the three long tables in the employee galley. “I don’t think I can lift me arms over me head anymore,” he said. “This will teach me to keep my mouth shut and stop being so bloody helpful. I think I will like being a printer’s helper better than being a steward. For one thing I won’t have to wear this monkey suit all day.” The white jacket, shirt, and pants came with a smart hat, but it automatically put his status as a steward. “After supper I am to report to the news room to collect all the papers that are ready and deliver them to all the passengers. That’s a lot of walking. Printer’s helper they call it. Fancy paperboy is all I am. Guess you can bet I will know this ship inside and out before I am through with her. The passengers will probably all want to know what’s for breakfast too.” Colin grumbled into his supper.

Across the table, Jacob and Lucas stared at him.

“What did you think, mon, that this job was a walk in the park?” Lucas asked with an incredulous tone. “At least you had handles to grab onto and got to walk about the decks of the ship and all. I got traded down to the mailroom early this morning to where they had me unloading all those mail sacks. I tell you, I could use the help. There be thousands of them. Put certain ones here, then those go over there, and pulling and dumping and moving so much in a tight space. I’ve been slogging mail sacks back and forth, separating the actual mail from the parcels, setting up little stations so the clerks can continue into smaller detail, to where it actually goes. On-board is one whole section in itself. They spent all day going through the letters by plugging them into these pigeon hole boxes and when the hole got too full they would bundle them up with twine and place a note to indicate which deck it belonged to. It’s a bloody long tedious job if you ask me. At least I got to move around the rooms some.” Lucas held his back and stretched.

Jacob took a bite of stew and stabbed his bread into the air. “Well, I say it’s a good thing that they feed us well. It’s so we have enough energy to keep up with this exuberant crowd we have on board. I’ve been assigned to walking several dogs. In fact, it appears it be the same ones I spied while we were all watching the boarding in Southampton. Wouldn’t you know it? I hate shit. I hate it, I hate it. I can’t stand the smell of any kind of it, it makes me gag. I know, I know, all I have to do is take a wee shovel and throw it into the ocean. It’s a quick pick up, then done, no more shit until next time. Picking it up, especially if it’s runny, just about has me over the edge puking my guts out. How would that look to the passengers?” Jacob asked wearily.

“I’ll trade with you,” Lucas said. “Shit don’t bother me. I’d rather handle shit all day than slogging mail. Who would we talk to about changing assignments?”

Colin had finished his supper of ham hocks and beans, some sort of vegetable soup, very tasty, with an assortment of breads and some lemon pie for dessert. “Well I’m off, mates,” Colin stated as he pushed back from the table. The chairs were attached to the table but swung around so he could get in and out easily. The table was attached to the hull. “Have a good evening, then.

If you are not busy this evening or not too tired in your case,” Colin said to Jacob. “I’ve been asked to join the orchestra in a song or two up in the First Class dining area, behind the stairwell. I’ll be playing my violin, of course. The best sort of luck, you see. Wally heard me play and asked if I could join them tonight after they get off. Anyway, come on up if you care to. It will be after the supper hours have finished, for the lingering crowd, I suppose.” Colin gave a wave as he headed for the companionway.

THE MEANDERINGS OF the four women brought them finally up to the Second Class entrance of the boat deck, where the lifeboats were.

Megan reached the top first and examined a lifeboat until they had finally all gathered again. “I guess they are strong enough to withstand the waves if we had to get in them?” Megan asked. She laughed then at her own joke. “Ha ha, that’s funny. Lifeboats on an unsinkable ship. Well there’s not too many of them, that’s for sure. I counted but twenty, even with the collapsible ones they have up top, and I still don’t think that is enough for all of us here on board. In case of a disaster, of course.”

As she turned back to join the others, her face dropped the smile and she quickly ducked behind the three women. But she was too slow.

“Megan? Megan is that you?” A gentleman in a white uniform was walking towards them. “My God, Megan, if that is you, please have the decency to show your face. Quit hiding behind that woman and face me. Come greet me proper and all.” He stood with his arms open wide and a huge smile on his face.

But Megan, staring through the women’s hats at him, knew what he was really feeling just by looking at his eyes. Burning, they were. So jovial on the outside but burning bright red on the inside. How she had wanted this meeting on her terms, damn it.

“Colin, me favorite brother,” Megan said as she removed herself from behind the women’s bodies. “How you be? We were just talking about you, weren’t we ladies?” She hesitantly went into his arms. He hugged her a little too tightly, but she got through it.

“Will you be playing? I see you have Violet with you. You see, Colin named his violin Violet when he was a wee lad and it stuck.”

All the women laughed.

“Me? What do you mean asking about me, here, now, of all times?” Colin was starting to raise his voice. Megan grabbed his arm and shoved him into a deck chair.

“Stay there, I’ll be right back.” Megan walked up to the women and said, “It’s my brother, Colin. He needs to talk to me. Go on and catch me up on the next go around. All right?”

Megan sat in another deck chair beside Colin’s and got comfortable, ignoring his glare. She stared out at the blue sea going by, watching the reflection of the sunlight that filtered through the clouds, to shine across the sea. It was beautiful. All right, here goes.

“I borrowed a ticket from a patron I knew wasn’t going to go on the voyage,” she said. “He had been given a refund and he said that he had destroyed the items in the envelope he had received and wanted his money back for the ticket he was holding. After he left, I was burning the trash and there was the ticket that Cecil had forgotten to void. It was still a real issued ticket as far as anyone else could see. Cecil won’t remember not stamping it. He will believe he did like he always does. This all happened almost the same day you got a job, so I decided I had to use it.”

“Use what?” Colin asked.

“The ticket. I used the ticket number to gain my passageway onto *Titanic*. The greatest ship ever. Someone I know said that, just recently.” She got a shove on her shoulder for that remark. “I entered on the Second Class ramp with a Third Class ticket, but all my other documents showed Second Class so he let me board. And then he told me to go give it to the Third Class purser. Can you believe the naiveté of some people? I still have the ticket. Now I have a souvenir.”

He gave her a look.

“I know, I know, it was dumb, but it worked. Here I am and now you know and here you are going, it appears, to play music on the ship of your dreams. Am I to miss that? No, I’m not. So, now we are on this adventure together. You go fulfill your dreams and I will carry on toward mine. I am on Deck D, Cabin 22. Come find me in the morning and we will talk some more. I can’t get too lost on the ship, even one this size.” Megan smiled over at him.

He, too, was smiling. “Aye, lass. Da will have your hide, sooner or later, you know that?”

“Aye, but you will be with me to keep an eye upon me so I don’t fall into traps that you see coming my way. And I thank you for that, in advance.”

“Any way you try to tangle your way through all this,” Colin gestured his arm all around, “you still should not be on board. But since you are, I can’t really say anything now, can I?”

“No, I suppose not. Thank you for that, too, then. But I’ve always wanted an adventure, not to be at home with everyone about. When *Titanic* came in that first day, I was almost overwhelmed with emotion. I had no idea until that man came in with the actual ticket wanting a refund that I would be going too. If I hadn’t gone to burn the trash that day?”

Colin replied, “It would have been fun to have experienced that with you. I forgive you. I’m right glad to know you are on board now. See you later on then?” Colin told her about the lounge area after the dinner and cigar hours were done. “Please come find me. Enjoy your meal. It should be announced soon.” With that said, he was off.

Megan joined the other women and continued to walk. She could tell they were curious about Colin, but they didn’t ask many questions. That was nice.

The gong sounded, a warning for the ladies and gentlemen who needed to dress for dinner. “Are we at a horse race?” Frances said snidely.

“It did sound rather like horses being called to the trough, didn’t it?” Emily asked.

“Well, I’m as hungry as a horse, so it sounds good to me,” Megan said. She reached in her pocket. “Oh damn. I think I left my handkerchief on the deck chair when I was talking to Colin. I need to go back.”

“Why?” Frances asked. “It’s just a handkerchief.”

“My mum tatted it for me. It’s more to me than just a kerchief.”

“I’ll go with you,” Alice said. She removed the cloak and handed it to Emily. “Thank you for the loan. It was lovely.”

“All right,” Emily said. She turned to Frances. “Come walk me to my cabin and we shall meet the others at dinner.” Over her shoulder she sent Alice a smoldering look. “See you both at dinner then?” Emily and Frances waltzed off ahead.

“What was that for?” Megan asked Alice, whose face had rapidly become pink.

“I’m not sure,” Alice said, “but I intend to find out. Let’s go find your handkerchief and then pick out our evening attire.” They walked a little further. Megan ran over and picked up her lost handkerchief. “You do know we dress for dinner here?” With that Alice turned into the stairway leading down to their deck.

“Uh, I guess I knew that. I just didn’t quite know what it really meant,” Megan replied as she followed Alice down the stairs. “I really do need your help on choosing an outfit that is worthy of First Class. That was an invitation to meet them for dinner in the First Class dining room, wasn’t it? I wish I had my mother’s bracelet with me instead of putting it in my steamer for deep storage.”

Megan tucked the handkerchief into her sleeve and began fussing over the outfit she had on. It was one of her best. Lord, how long was this voyage, and did she have enough clothes to get her through it? She was sure, now that they were underway, she did not have enough clothes to pull off all this stuff one had to do to change her life. What to do?

Alice stopped in front of her and said, “Yes, I shall choose our outfits and then we shall dine with the Cheswicks and, I suppose, the Westbrookes and some other people I won’t know until we get there, so no worries, I am here to assist you.” Alice grabbed Megan’s arm and pulled her towards the staircase.

“I love this view. If you look down through this bend and line up the entire staircase all the way down, you can peer through to the bottom. I think it is where the class they call steerage is located. Come, have a look.” Alice pulled Megan over to the staircase edge.

Megan stood in the exact place that Alice had stood a moment before and leaned over to peer down. Megan felt a hand on her shoulder. Alice’s hot breath on her ear tickled slightly, or did it register somewhere else? Her heart pounded loudly in her ears.

“Here, line up here,” Alice said softly.

Megan looked down the stairway and was duly impressed. Alice had backed off from Megan to give her some room to enjoy the view. Megan suddenly missed the warmth of Alice’s body leaning into hers. Megan turned and smiled. “That was nice.” Alice smiled back and they continued to walk to their cabin.

# Chapter Ten

## 10 April 1912 — late afternoon

AS SOON AS Colin entered the mail room, he saw Jacob. “I don’t know how you did it, but here I am reporting for duty, sir.” Colin snapped to attention and gave a smart salute. “I am impressed, to say the least. How did you do it? Helping in the mail room? My God, how hard can that be? It’s got to be easier than delivering newspapers all over this giant floating city.”

Jacob smiled and said, “Welcome to the mail room, chap. Yes, I found a poor schmuck willing to trade for shoveling shit and peddling papers, while we get to transport mail bags to and from the ferry. Lucas is also one of the firemen assigned to the task. I asked if you could be spared as well to give me a hand, and they were willing.”

Lucas waved a hello and hefted his sack over his shoulder and walked by.

“Glad you could be spared to come help. There’s an overabundance of mail for just the clerks aboard,” continued Jacob. “We can help them by letting them do their job separating and delivering mail to the proper area. Our job is to separate these mail bags from the parcels and the First Class and Registered mail to the areas soon to be listed by one of the staff. Easy enough then. We’ll get started in a bit.”

Jacob took a step away from the others and whispered to Colin, “I’d like to talk with you, if I may, in private.”

“You’re the boss, Boss.” Colin followed Jacob into a small alcove.

Jacob looked around before whispering, “I’ve got a tale for you and I implore your secrecy and integrity.”

“Okay.”

“I found out that I have a daughter in Cherbourg. Her mother is dying and wants me to take her. I think she is around seventeen or eighteen and I’ve never met her,” Jacob stated sadly. “I was not even aware of her existence until a week ago. But, I need your help. Lucas is already aware of the situation and has come up with a plan using the mail bags. It is brilliant. Anyway, we have been thinking that it would be so much easier if we had a third. You, as it seems. Would you be willing to help us and then keep your mouth shut about it and all?”

Colin nodded. He lowered his eyebrows and just kept staring at Jacob.

“All righty, then, as it goes, we set board on the ferry going in as usual. Then on the way back, we have got Alexandria stashed in a mail bag, surrounded by hundreds of other mail bags, and carry her back safely on board. With all of us looking out for each other, it should be a smooth passage. We’ve only got an hour and a half to come and go. No dallying in port.”

“But I’ve never been to France. Can I at least go touch the sand to say I’ve been there?” Colin asked. “Besides Ireland and England, I’ve never been anywhere. By the time I get to the Americas I’ll be a world traveler.”

Jacob answered, “Oh, ho, boyo, you can’t just waltz down to the sandy beaches and frolic away the afternoon. We’re still working, mon. Even though I am stealing my daughter on board and all.”

Colin laughed heartily. “Okay, but if you think that your daughter is going to willingly get into a mail bag, then you don’t know shit about women.”

“I know I don’t, and I don’t have a lot of time to learn. It’s not time to go yet but soon enough. Thank you again for your discretion.”

Jacob stuck out his hand. Colin grabbed it and shook it like he meant it.

“I’ll do my best for you, sir. I’ll go report to Lucas.” With that Colin walked over to Lucas.

“What do you want me to do?”

THE CHESWICKS AND the Westbrookes were to join Alice and Megan at table nine at the six o’clock dinner hour, or late dinner, in the First Class dining room located on C deck.

“It looks like we are the first here. Let’s sit, shall we?” Alice said. She pulled the chair out for Megan to sit. She looked beautiful, Alice thought. The light blue satin dress flowed around her as she sat. Alice sat down to her right.

That was barely done before they heard the booming voice of Fletcher. “Splendid, splendid, Alice, I see you found us and your accommodations? Hrrmmph, Helene, my dear, why don’t you sit next to Alice?”

A blur appeared and suddenly Frances was in the seat beside Alice. Helene looked at Frances and said, “If you wanted to sit there, all you had to do was say so.” She then patted the chair next to her and said, “Sit, Fletcher. It doesn’t matter what order we sit in, does it? This is fine. Please sit down.” Fletcher held her chair for her and then sat in his own.

“Fletcher, Helene, let me introduce you both to Miss Megan Mahoney from Southampton.” They both greeted her with friendly curiosity. A lull in the conversation had Alice lifting a plate and examining it. Alice exclaimed, “It looks like we are the first people to have ever eaten off these plates. There’s not a scratch on them from silverware or stacking or anything. They are so stylish with the red flag in the middle.” Alice lowered her voice so only Megan could hear. “Now, do not be overwhelmed if there are too many forks and spoons to eat with. Just work from the outside into the middle and you will be fine.”

“I will be fine, thank you,” Megan said. “This is all part of the adventure, as I see it. I’m a quick learner. I won’t embarrass you.”

“No, no embarrassment for me. I remember my first experience at a formal dinner party. Disastrous, I must say. It seems that trial and error worked in the end for me, but I shall spare you some of the subtle things that will come along. I must warn you that sometimes these dinners take up to an hour or more to consume with about ten courses in all.” Alice had leaned over to Megan so as not to shout. The music wasn’t really in the background. The musicians were off to the side, but directly behind Alice’s left. Oh well, it was nice. Keep playing gentlemen. She leaned back and smiled sweetly at Megan.

Their conversation was interrupted by two older gentlemen settling into the chairs on the other side of Megan. They announced their names as if at a convention. The short, stout one with the fluffy moustache started first. “My name is Reginald Baumgartner but my friends call me Reggie.” He smiled over to the other gentleman, a few years older than himself.

“And my name is François Miltoon, one T, two O’s.” He was a dark little man with a wiry moustache. He pulled out his pocket watch and said to Reggie, “What time did you say it was, hmmm? It seems I’m famished,” not seeming to realize that they had been joined by Emily Westbrooke and her brother.





“You’re the musician in the family,” Alice said. “Good. Can you help us? We are in deep discussion about a particular song I seem to have stuck in my head.” Alice began humming despite the look of horror coming across her friends’ faces. “Hm, pause, hmm hmm, hm, hm, hm, hm, hmmm.” Once again, there was no clarity or melody or rhythm of any kind.

“Err, yes, well.” Colin scrunched his face and tried to ponder. “Come on up to the First Class dining room lounge tonight and see if you hear it again. Then when you do, just let one of your girlfriends know that’s the one and Megs can come tell me. What say you? Would that do the trick? If it’s at all popular, ten shillings says they will play it again.” He bowed. “It was a pleasure, ladies. I do hope you will all come up to the lounge and take in a song or two. It could be fun. What else is there to do on this ship, anyway? Megan, may I accompany you to your room to retrieve something you have that I would like to borrow? Ladies?”

Walking away Megan asked, “What’s in my room that you need to borrow, Colin?”

“Well, you did say you had your ticket still, so I was hoping that I could borrow it and use the open berth in your cabin for a friend’s daughter. She is in Cherbourg, but the way he thinks he’s going to get her on board isn’t going to work. That’s when I thought about you and what you had said about your ticket. If she comes in on the Third Class plank then it would be recorded and you both would be free. Dare say you’ll let me do that, won’t you, Megs?”

“Of course I will. Any chance I can get the ticket back as a souvenir? And why are you helping this friend? What is her name? Does she speak English?”

“You are as curious as always, eh, Megan? I don’t have the answers to any of your questions, as I have yet to meet her. It will all come about in its proper time,” Colin said.

When they reached her room, Megan walked over to her clutch bag and drew out the ticket. “Put this number on the tags and she can have this berth here.” Megan pointed to the one above hers.

“God speed and thank you. Her name is Alexandria, and I’ll try to get the ticket back. But I don’t really think you want the authorities after you if they discover this ticket has been used twice. Right then.” Colin took the ticket and rushed out the door. “Come find me in the First Class lounge later on then.” And with that, he was off to return to work.

“I’VE GOT THE solution to your problem, ’ol man,” Colin said coming up behind Jacob.

Jacob turned. “Have you now? Let’s hear it.”

“Okay, my sister’s ticket didn’t get collected. She was supposed to hand it to a Third Class seaman but she didn’t. She wanted a souvenir. So, I have taken it upon myself to get rid of it for her and will get your daughter on board without putting her in a mail sack. Lord knows why you think that would have worked. As I said before, you obviously do not know shit about women. Anyway, we need to get the labels for luggage and such before we leave this ship and go out on the tender.”

“We have been assigned to the tender, SS Nomadic. It’s leaving in five minutes. You sure did use all the time that was allowed. But you did good, me boy.” Jacob slapped Colin on the back with enough force to propel Colin forward.

They grabbed a handful of luggage tags, ran to the tender, and jumped aboard. Lucas gave them a hearty wave from the bow. All was well. Jacob and Colin went into the crew cabin. While Colin stood watch, Jacob wrote in the ticket number 242154 on each corresponding tag. He put

them all in the White Star Line envelope and put the ticket on top, then slid them all into the front inside pocket of his jacket.

“All right, then, let’s keep a look out for a young woman with a red scarf on.” Jacob seemed nervous. “I get to see my daughter for the very first time in just a couple of minutes now.”

Colin peered out at France, as excited as if he was a boy. He watched the shore of France getting bigger and stood on his toes to get a better view. His face broke out in a wide open grin as he stared out onto the coastline of sand and the dock that was getting closer and closer. This was the life he had wanted for so long. The sea air whipped his hair around. He breathed so deeply, he could feel the molecules of moisture in the air explode in his lungs. Such an adventure this was.

As the tender arrived at the shore, it was plain to see no one had thought about all the other people who were going to be at the dock waiting to board. At least seven hundred other souls wished to gain passage on the greatest ship ever. Fear showed in Jacob’s face.

“My God. How am I ever going to find her?” He looked around at the crowd and back at Colin. He raised his arms with a questioning look.

They were set to dock. Jacob and Colin jumped off to put the giant ropes onto the cleats that were provided on the dock. The gangplank was stretched out and attached to the tender. They started to grab the mail bags and haul them on board. Passengers gathered in a line to board *Titanic*. One by one they boarded the tender and waited to head back out to *Titanic*. Jacob looked back out into the crowd that was slowly dispersing. His face was filled with panic.

Colin climbed on top of some boxes to see if he could find her in the thinning crowd. “There!” Colin pointed to a very petite young woman with auburn hair cascading down her back in fluffy curls. “Do you see her?”

Jacob’s eyes followed in the direction that Colin had pointed. “Aye.” Jacob seemed overcome with emotion. “She is but how I envisioned. A spitting image of her mother at that age. Oh how I remember her now.”

“Let’s go, mate, before we lose her.” He and Jacob ran along the pier searching for the girl Jacob once knew. Suddenly, Jacob stopped. “That’s her.” Colin saw the girl, standing there looking demure and proper, and a little anxious too, he believed.

“Excuse me?” Jacob asked. “Would you by chance be Alexandria?”

The young woman looked up at Jacob with huge green eyes and nodded her head.

“It’s like looking into me own soul. Aye, me. It is you. And here I thought I wouldn’t recognize you. You look too much like her. How is she? Has she?” He left the last question hanging, as if he wasn’t sure he wanted to know the answer.

“Mama? The last time I saw her she was on her last breath. I had to leave to come find you. You are exactly the way she described you. Though probably a little fuller through the middle. No, that isn’t how you say it? I’m sorry but my English is a little rusty. We were taught in my Switzerland school but I have had very little use for it here in France.”

“Ho ho, that’s all right. We will get along just fine. Here is your ticket, and are these your bags here?” Jacob pointed to the two bags she had at her feet. “We’ll take care of these, you just go on up that ramp over there and I will see you on board. Your cabin and berth number are here on these papers. I will bring you your baggage once we get back to *Titanic*. Now, which ones do you need for your travel now and which one is for deep storage?”

Alexandria stared over at him, seemed to think about what he said and pointed. “These two for my room, please.”

SUCH A WHIRLWIND it had been. From the moment she saw that big ship in the harbor, Alexandria thought she had just about died. It was so beautiful, sitting out there on the horizon waiting for all of these people to get on board and follow their dreams to America. She was so glad she had done a little questioning to find out where *Titanic* was headed.

A tender boat came out from *Titanic*. How in the world were they going to get all of them on board that craft? But the closer the little boat got, the bigger it got. It was just an illusion of a small boat. Yes, the tender was big enough for all. A White Star Line vessel, and her father worked for them. How nice.

He was nice. Although, she hadn't really thought about him as a person, just as her father. Now that he was here and giving her a ticket onto *Titanic*, she was sad and thrilled at the same time. She was leaving the only country she had ever known, if she didn't count boarding school, of course. But now she had neither her mother nor her school to rescue her any more from the hardships of life. Here her father had taken her under his wing and off to America she would go. A brand new life with her father now, instead of her mother.

Alexandria only needed to walk up the plank onto the ship, hand over her ticket, and go find her cabin and berth. It did sound easy enough. Handing the ticket to the officer on duty, she said, "Is there any chance that I may have it back for a souvenir? *S'il vous plait?*"

"No, ma'am, these are property of the White Star Line. Move along, please. Go find a seat and we will be off shortly." Alexandria found herself waiting at the gunnels to watch France move away from her. Goodbye, Mama. I will always love you. She turned and saw that the farther away France became, the closer *Titanic* grew.

"My." Alexandria covered her mouth and got up with everyone to board *Titanic*. It was a grand sight to behold. Walking into the foyer was like something out of a princess book, or a fairy tale. What a foyer it was. As she looked straight up, she saw a huge dome that she suspected would be full of sunlight if it were daytime. She could almost see the stars twinkling their hello and their welcome to her new life.

She stopped to read her paperwork again as she finished climbing the stairs. All right, she was on D deck. She was a little tired, but she was more anxious to meet up with her father and talk with him. It was all so grand.

# Chapter Eleven

## 10 April 1912 — Evening

THE ATMOSPHERE IN the First Class lounge that evening was festive. Megan found a table and they all seated themselves. Alice sat across from Frances and Megan sat across the square table from Emily. Sitting across from Emily, instead of walking beside her, gave Megan a whole new perspective of her. She was so sophisticated. Here Megan had thought that Alice and Frances were of the upper crust, but they were downright ordinary compared to Emily. Who would have thought that Megan would be sitting in the First Class lounge, enjoying the same atmosphere that the rich did? Emily was a beautiful, wealthy woman who seemed to have everything she could ever want. A better personality perhaps? She really had nothing in common with Emily, Megan realized. Except, possibly, Alice. A waiter arrived and asked what their pleasure was. Emily ordered a bottle of champagne.

“The very best you have, for my companions and me. I am eternally grateful that they are here to help relieve the boredom of the ship. I’ve had a marvelous time so far on this voyage.” Emily turned to look at Alice first and then included the rest of them. Megan tried to meet Alice’s eye, but she was gazing at Emily, so Megan smiled at Frances. She received nothing in return. She glanced around for her brother.

The waiter returned with a bottle labeled Heidsieck and Company, Blue Top Brut Champagne, and said stoically, “Would this be sufficient, madam?”

Emily looked at the bottle and made a motion for him to turn the bottle around so she could see the back. She smiled and said, “Yes, yes that will be delightful.”

He poured a tiny drip into a glass flute and handed it to Emily. Megan hoped they would get to fill their glasses a bit fuller than that. Uncle Donovan would be ashamed to offer such a skimpy drink. But after Emily sipped, smiled, and nodded her approval, the waiter filled all their flutes to the brim and silently slipped away.

Emily gathered her flute in her hand and gestured for them all to join her. “I’d like to make a toast. To the wonders of *Titanic* and all she can give us on this voyage. Let’s make this voyage memorable, shall we?”

Megan clasped her glass and swung her arm into the air and said, “To making it memorable.”

Alice and Frances stood together and both repeated, “To making it memorable.” They gently touched their flutes and smiled around the table.

“A good beginning, I think,” Megan said. “Thank you for the bubbly and all.” She sipped, and Megan’s words came out gushing. “My Lord, this is wonderful. I just love the way the bubbles make my throat feel. It tickles. I like it, very much.”

Alice chuckled and said, “First time?”

Megan replied, “Yes, as a matter of fact, it is my first time. I apologize that I haven’t been as worldly a traveler as you, but there has to come a time when you just do what you want and to hell with the consequences. So if this is the first of many, many other things that I get to enjoy

now, then, so be it. This may be the first of many firsts on board *Titanic*.” She took another huge swallow.

Frances gasped and said, “You don’t really mean what I think you mean, do you?”

“Well, um, yes, I do, I think.” Megan smiled. “I’d like some more bubbly, please.” She held out her flute, hoping that would change the subject.

Emily filled the flute, set the bottle down, and said, “I remember my first time. It was ohhh, so long ago. But then, every time is a first, wouldn’t you say? As long as the earth moves, that’s all I say.” Emily laughed and wiggled her eyebrow at Alice.

“I certainly remember my first,” Alice said. “It was memorable for many reasons, but one is that I was taught how to read palms. Here, Emily, let me read yours.” She took Emily’s left hand gently and turned it palm up. She gazed into Emily’s eyes.

“Here is your life line.” She took her finger and traced a line on Emily’s hand. “It tells how long you are supposed to live. Yours is nice and long.” Alice’s finger swept slowly up to Emily’s wrist and Megan could have sworn Emily shivered. She traced her own finger up her wrist but it didn’t tickle at all. She imagined Alice’s finger instead of her own and she felt a bit of a tingle. It was so bold of Alice to caress Emily’s hand like that in public.

“Do me next, please,” Megan said.

Alice smiled over at her, almost laughing. “All right. Let me finish up here first.” Alice closed her hand to enclose Emily’s in hers and said, “And this is your love line.” She swooped her finger around the pad of Emily’s palm. “You’re a busy girl, aren’t you?”

Megan slid her finger on her palm, imaging Alice’s finger again, and felt herself grow warm.

“Here, make a fist,” Alice said. Emily did. “This shows how many children you are supposed to have.”

Emily laughed. “I don’t think that is very accurate. I don’t plan on having any. If I did, the child would be a miracle baby. I know the best trick of all for having sex without making babies.”

Megan tried not to look shocked. They were talking about sex right out in the open. Megan was accustomed to such talk from the men at the pub, but for ladies to speak so openly like this was, well, unheard of.

Even Frances had perked up at the new subject and seemed not at all shocked. Was Megan the only virgin at the table? She was twenty-six, at least as old as Emily and far older than Frances. But when could she have done it? She was either working or at home or at Uncle Donovan’s with her brothers always about. She had never had a chance. Megan saw Emily give Alice a long look and lean over to whisper in Alice’s ear. Alice adjusted her hat, tucked a loose strand of hair, and gave a long slow nod and a smile.

Megan kept watching, fascinated. They were both so becoming. She noticed that Emily touched Alice a lot. A little touch here, or there, when she laughed or slightly brushed off an unseen thread on Alice’s top. Alice leaned her body toward Emily’s as they spoke quietly between themselves.

Finally, Alice turned toward Megan. “All right, Megan, give me your left hand.”

At last. Megan extended her hand and placed it into Alice’s, which was still warm from holding Emily’s for so long.

“As I was telling Emily, this is your lifeline.” She traced her finger on one of the lines of Megan’s palm, and Megan shivered, just like Emily had. Alice’s real finger felt quite different than the imaginary one.

“I see you are going to have a very long life. That’s good, right?” Alice smiled at her and Megan nodded, fascinated by how Alice’s eyes drew the light into them and twinkled at her. They stared at each other for a long moment.

“Urmph.” Emily cleared her throat, breaking the trance.

Megan removed her hand from Alice’s quickly, took a drink and looked around, embarrassed by her thoughts. She noticed how quiet Frances had become. She had her lips closed tightly and her eyebrows were pushed together on her face as she glared at Alice. Her eyes had a burning look to them. Megan was thankful Frances’s mood wasn’t directed at her. Or was it? Was there a connection somehow?

Music suddenly filled the air and broke the tension at the table. The full nine members of the orchestra were in attendance this first evening. The music started out a bit mundane and then grew to a faster pace, switching from hymns to waltzes. The ladies were soon tapping their toes and smiling all around.

Emily’s brother, Ethan, arrived and extended his hand and said, “Please, would anyone care to dance who isn’t my sister?” Everyone at the table laughed and looked at Emily, who smiled gaily.

Frances jumped up and said, “Well, I’m not your sister,” and she grabbed Ethan’s hand and led him onto the dance floor.

Megan watched Frances and Ethan waltz together, flowing with the music from the orchestra. Frances was very light on her feet and moved with Ethan effortlessly. Megan wished she had learned to dance like that. Another dance started. Emily said it was a fox trot, which was Ethan’s favorite.

“They are making me tired just watching them with all that dancing going on,” Megan said. She watched as Emily leaned over to whisper into Alice’s ear, once again. Without Frances to talk to, Megan felt all alone. “I need to carry myself to my cabin and turn in for the night. I’m knackered. It’s been quite the day. Give my regards to your brother and Frances for me, will you please, Emily? Good night.” She slightly bowed her head at Emily, then Alice, and backed away from the table. Suddenly she turned back, grabbed her fluted glass, and finished what was left of her champagne. “Don’t want it to go to waste now, do we?” Megan turned around again, but this time she made it to the stairs and disappeared down them.

EMILY LET ALICE into her suite and locked the door behind her, but not before she put the little sign out saying “please do not disturb” so the porter would know in the morning not to bother her until she was ready.

“Well, here I am,” Alice said. “I’m not sure what you really meant in your cryptic message. Was there something we needed to discuss in private?”

“Yes, well, I’ve been feeling very neglected these past two weeks,” Emily said. “Here I thought you would have come calling on me sometime.”

Alice appeared confused. Emily stated, “You do remember what happened two weeks ago, correct?”

Alice replied, “I do, somewhat, but it’s not something I want to talk about. I thought I’d never see you again.”

“I see.”

“No, I don’t think you do. That is one reason I took you up on your offer this evening. I would like to get to know you before we, umm.”

“Would you like a glass of sherry?” Emily asked politely.

“Yes, I suppose that would help ease the awkward feeling, wouldn’t it?” Alice said. “I would love a glass of sherry, yes, please, to help soothe my throat and calm my nerves. I want to start off with, that is, I mean, well, I’m not usually that friendly with someone I don’t know. I’m not usually like I was that night. I was just feeling very, umm, frisky that evening. You see, I had taken a powder for my headaches and must have gotten a little too much, and then pairing that with the wine we had at the castle, well, I must admit, I do not remember much of the evening beyond the second dance I had with, oh, your brother, I think. You must have rescued him from me. I’m so sorry if I caused you any trouble.”

“So, you don’t remember walking into the garden with me?”

“Vaguely.”

“And sitting under the trees on a bench that looked out over the river?”

“Again, vaguely,” Alice replied.

“So you don’t remember when I kissed you and then you kissed me back and then you boldly went under my skirt with your hand?”

“I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did. No one, not man or woman, has ever been so bold in their intentions before.” Emily reached out to touch Alice’s hair. She took a small golden strand and twirled it around her fingers, caressing it, almost petting it. Alice took a step away. Emily let go.

“I asked if you wanted to leave with me, and you said yes,” Emily said. “So we had another touching incident in the cloakroom, and then two women came in and grabbed their wraps, and suddenly they handed yours to you and off you went with them. Now that I think about it, I’m very surprised they didn’t catch us with our hands where they did not belong. You did look beautiful that night, the way your hair came tumbling down from its twist knot when I took the pins out. I had handfuls of hair wrapped around my fingers, just thinking how wonderful it would be, to be able to touch. But you are so much more becoming tonight. The way the light is shadowing your face, giving you a luxurious tone.” She reached out to touch Alice’s hair again. “I just want to get to know you better, that’s all,” she whispered as she tried to gather Alice in her arms.

Alice took a step backward to avoid the hug. She held her head down, casting a demure look of guilt at Emily. “I do like the ladies. And you are quite the sight to look at. You are so beautiful and I probably was taken with you. I mean, I am taken with you.” She stumbled with her words. “I’m sorry I came across that way. That’s not really me. It was the combination of the powder and the bitter. I’ll have to look into that when I get back home. In the meantime, I know not to mix the two if I want to remember the evening and what I did during the night. Unless, of course, I don’t want to remember.”

Emily almost snorted but held in her laugh. She knew how Alice was that night. A firecracker, that’s what, and she wanted that firecracker again, only this time, lying down. Alice had given Emily one of the best moments of Emily’s wandering life. How could Alice not remember?

“Well then,” Emily said, “we have but a few days to rectify that. This voyage will soon enough end and we will find ourselves in my city. I can show you the sights, the sounds. How about the Ziegfeld Follies? Would you like to go see them? Oh, we shall have a grand time. I just hope you don’t hate it.”

“Hate it?” Alice gazed around Emily’s suite. It was quite like the Cheswicks, really, though it held some personal things. There was a picture of Emily and her brother, and another of a huge gathering of people on a ship on a river. They all looked happy and relaxed out in the sunshine. “I love that woman’s hat.” Alice spun around and asked, “I’m sorry, what am I going to hate?”

“New York, silly.” Emily laughed and handed Alice a glass of sherry. Clinking her glass with Alice’s she said, “Here is to our wondrous voyage together. May she sail straight and true to our home across the water, at least my home. New York isn’t really where I live, but I love the city. It has so many wonderful things to do and see. It is a dirty place though. That is why we live in Pennsylvania. It has green, green grassland and trees and rivers and streams with lots of fish in them to catch and eat. My family has been in that area for years and years. We love it there. The river is really wonderful. My family owns a shipyard there. I hope you will enjoy it as much as I. Do you ride?”

“Horses? No, I don’t ride, but I’m not so fixed in my thinking that I might not try someday. Is it always we? We, we, we. Do you and your brother always travel together?”

“Ethan and I are part of a large family that all works too hard and too long for days on end. My brother is not made for that grueling sort of work. Pulling wet sheets in off the mainsail to hoist another somewhat drier sheet is hard work, too hard for him, so the family decided to clothe him and send him off with me in search of good contacts worldwide, representing the family business. It also keeps us both out of their way, both of us being of, how do I say this delicately? We lean a different way from the rest of the family, perhaps. You know what I mean? It wreaked havoc in the family. They felt it could be better handled by sending us abroad. So off we go, out of their hands with money to spare. Sad, if you really think about it, isn’t it? We keep an eye out for one another.”

“And that works for you both? You have no particular attachments otherwise?” Alice asked.

“Well, for me, I haven’t met the right one. You know, *the one*, yet.”

“So you believe that there is a special person for each of us?” Alice asked.

“Yes, don’t you?”

Alice paused. “Well, yes, as a matter of fact, I do. I’m not sure I will know exactly when I meet her, but somewhere in the back of my mind I will keep her until I get a chance to watch her a while longer. Then I shall make a decision to get to know her better and see where it all goes, or not. I generally like to know the person with whom I am having relations,” Alice said softly.

“Humph, a little late for that at this setting, isn’t it? I mean we didn’t actually sleep together, yet, but it was the most sensuous encounter I have ever had. If you don’t remember that evening in question, why on earth did you smile at me and give me those lip kissing motions while the ship was departing from Southampton?”

“I didn’t. You, I believe, were staring at me,” Alice said. “I found you very attractive and just made fun with you. You know, enjoying the moment and all. You are very fun to flirt with. I thought you might want to take up with that this night,” Alice said lightly.

“But I do.” Emily could hardly wait. She turned her back to Alice and removed her shawl. Turning to wrap her arms around Alice from behind, she whispered into her ear as she undid her hairpins. “You may place your clothes over that chair.”

Alice pulled away. “No, I told you. You misunderstood me then, and now you misunderstand me again.” She put her glass down with a plunk. “I shall be bidding you goodnight. I shall possibly see you out upon the decks. I do wish you a pleasant voyage and it was nice to make your acquaintance.” Alice pulled her hair back off her neck.

Emily turned around. “What? I thought you wanted to take up where we left off?”



“I meant flirting. I do not just jump into bed with people I barely know. I thought I explained what happened that night. I am fully in my senses now, and I can tell you that I need to be wooed. I want to feel loved and cherished by my person, whoever she turns out to be. I thought this might turn out to be a captivating evening, but instead, you have turned it into nothing but sex. Well, no thank you. Again, good night.” Alice turned and walked out the door.

Emily was stunned. That was certainly not the scenario she’d had in mind for the night. She wondered if Alice would stay angry for long. She hoped not. They didn’t have much time.

Emily would woo her. She had the rest of the voyage to do so. Yes, it was a good idea. She was glad she had thought of it. It was a splendid idea. Alice would feel differently towards her by the end of this voyage, Emily was sure of it.

She washed her face and arms before putting on her nightgown. She would get a good night’s sleep and start again in the morning. She would just apologize to Alice and carry on. She was sorry Alice left in such a huff, though. Snuggling down in bed she thought how much better it would be with Alice to help warm her.

Emily drifted off to sleep with a smile on her face.

ALICE HELD ONTO the brass handrails in the hall and tried to settle her breathing. She needed to go to her cabin. By the time she figured out the correct staircase, she was steaming.

Of all the nerve. She had tried to tell Emily she wasn’t like that woman she appeared to be when they first met. Well, yes she was that woman, just not as wanton as that. Alice was flattered at Emily’s attentions, of course. Emily could have anyone she wanted on this ship, man or woman. Alice should be jumping for joy that Emily chose her in the first place. She had no status of which to speak, no worldly goods, but Emily wanted her. Alice knew she did, she could see it in her eyes.

What beautiful blue eyes Emily had. Alice could get lost in them. But no, Emily had to open her mouth about that teeny, tiny little incident in the garden and ruin it all. If it really even happened. It was all from Emily’s perspective, wasn’t it?

She would see how Emily was tomorrow. Alice hoped she knew that she owed her an apology for her horrid behavior tonight. Alice had only told the truth. She did want to be cherished and she did want to be loved. She wanted more than just sex. She would have to see how Emily treated her in the morning. Alice would be graciously polite until Emily gave her some sort of an apology. Then Alice might, just might, concede and let Emily entertain her some on the voyage.

Alice did so enjoy the champagne.

She felt one of her dreadful headaches coming on. She had some powders in her case, no, that wouldn’t do at all. Look what happened the last time she mixed the two. Not again. She would suffer through the headache and remember not to partake of such strong spirits. They gave her a bloody nasty headache.

Alice reached her cabin and slipped quietly inside.

“You don’t have to tiptoe around in the dark, silly. Here, let me turn on a light,” Megan said softly. The light glowed on. “It is so nice not to have to strike a match just to put on a little light. These new electric lights are keen.”

“I’m sorry to have awoken you,” Alice said equally as soft. “I’ll try and be quick about it now so you can go back to sleep.”

“Oh, that’s all right. I wasn’t really asleep anyway. Where have you been? Oh, I’m sorry. That is a bit too personal, isn’t it?” Megan covered her mouth with her hand, her eyes twinkling.

“Well, I could tell you that I was just out walking on the deck by myself, but I’m sure you wouldn’t believe me. I wouldn’t believe me. The truth of the matter is, I was invited up to another passenger’s cabin for a night cap. Simple, really. Then I left and came here. That’s the story.” Alice finished changing into her night clothes. She climbed into the bottom bunk opposite Megan and said, “Good night, Megan. Sweet dreams and all.”

Minutes passed before Megan spoke again. “Oh. We have a new roommate who got on in Cherbourg. She’s not here right yet, but her name is Alexandria. I’ve had the most amazing day. It’s hard to calm down my brain in order to sleep. Can we talk?”

Alice replied, “I would normally, but I have such a headache that I just want to close my eyes and sleep. We’ll talk tomorrow, okay? About anything you want. Whatever your little heart desires.” Alice all but mumbled that last part.

“All right, we can do that. I’m sorry for your head. Was it the champagne? Did you stay much longer in the lounge after I left? Did my brother ever show up to play tonight? Isn’t he a great violinist? Did you know he named his violin Violet? Funny isn’t it, Violet, the violin.”

“Please, Megan, can you stop with the questions. Are you always like this?”

“Okay, sorry. Sorry.” Megan turned off the light and settled in her bunk. “Good night,” she said softly.

# Chapter Twelve

## 11 April 1912 — At sea

FRANCES AWOKE THE next morning famished. She wished she had eaten more the night before, rather than worrying about what people thought, as if everyone was watching what she ate. She hated to eat in public. She was glad it was only a seven day cruise or even less, until they got settled in for the holiday. Maybe she could ask Momma if they could have a private brunch on their deck, where they could see but not be seen. Yes, that would be splendid. Dinner was enough of a social event for her. She would ring the porter after she talked to Momma and order up food and some of that delicious coffee.

She pulled an old favorite robe over her sleeping apparel. It was good enough. It was just Momma and Poppa, after all, and possibly Alice, for brunch. “She has seen you in much worse, I assure you,” she said silently to the image staring back at her in her hand mirror. Slippers went on next and, with a pull of the curtain, she entered the common room she shared with her parents.

The sun was shining so brightly she immediately shut her eyes, but not before taking in the display of food surrounding her mother. “What’s this? I didn’t hear a thing. Is this all for you?” Frances was incredulous. She rushed to the other side of the room and opened the windows out on the sea for a wonderful, fresh breeze. Breathing deeply, she said, “Well, thank you for letting me sleep in. It was quite the day yesterday, wasn’t it?” She turned to face the table.

“Come darling,” Helene said. “Come join me for the most delicious brunch I have ever been served. Just look at this spread we have before us. It’s a thing called catering that all the ships are going to. One can choose from any of the four restaurants on board. Anything. From any of the four different restaurants that are here on *Titanic*. Can you even imagine? So here, let’s fix you up with some of this Lorraine omelet, and some bananas with cream, of course, and then how about a little Puffed Rice, I know how you love those.” Helene seemed to have a grand time loading her daughter’s plate with food. She started on the second plate with some split country sausage and some pulled bread with honey. Helene set the plates down across from where she was sitting.

Frances sat down and poured a cup of coffee. She preferred coffee to tea. It made her feel brighter. Taking her first sip, she smiled. It was exactly like last night. Bold with a hint of, she was not exactly sure what, but it was delicious. “This is superb, simply superb.” She began to eat. “They certainly do feed us well on this voyage, don’t they Momma?”

At that moment, Fletcher came into the room and found them at the table. “Splendid, I’m famished.” He started to pile food on the plates, one dish upon the other until he had a small pyramid before him. He sat down next to Helene and spread out his brunch. Frances took notice how high he had piled the food onto his plate. No wonder his belly was getting so round. She lowered her fork.

“Heavens, Fletcher, must you always claim the whole table as yours? Haven’t you ever heard of sharing?” It was obvious that Helene was upset with him.

“Has anyone seen Alice up and about this day?” Frances inquired.

“No, and that reminds me, Fletcher, why isn’t Alice here with us?” Helene turned to look at Fletcher. “She is our goddaughter after all.”

Fletcher got all huffy and exclaimed, “It was a matter of money, my dear. No concern of yours now. She is fine where she is. Second Class is as nice as this. At this late date and all, this was the only First Class suite available. Any other ship would consider where she is to be as grand as First Class.”

“Well, then, why can’t I stay down in Second Class with her?” Frances asked. “It’s not fair that I have to stay here with only a curtain between us.”

“No darling,” Helene said. “Alice is my goddaughter, but you are my baby. I can’t have you rooming alone, especially not in Second Class. I only wish Alice could be with us.”

“But I’d be with Alice, not rooming alone,” Frances whined.

“She is fine. Mark my words,” Fletcher said. “I have never let you down, have I, Pumpkin?”

Helene’s fiery red hair had always been a sore spot for her, but Fletcher was delighted in the nicknames he could come up with.

“Oh, Poppa, could you get any sappier?” Frances sighed.

“Who’s sappy?” Alice asked, sweeping into the room and grabbing a cup off the tray. She poured herself some coffee from the carafe and sat next to Frances.

“Poppa and his love names for Momma,” Frances said. They all shared in a hearty laugh and then got down to the business of eating. All that could be heard was the scraping of silverware on the new plates and cups. Frances sipped her coffee and gazed outside toward the sea.

Helene asked Alice, “How is your cabin? I just found out about the accommodations, of course. Do you have to share with strangers, dear?”

“Only one. A girl boarded at Cherbourg, but I haven’t met her yet. Her name is Alexandria. She came in after I was asleep. And there’s Megan, of course, who is no longer a stranger. You met her last night. Thank you again for allowing her to join us at dinner. I know it was a treat for her. I’m thrilled to be rooming with her.”

Frances listened as she sipped her coffee. Alice was thrilled, was she? Here Frances had hoped it would just be her and Alice, arm in arm, strolling along the promenade, together in her fantasy world. Frances went back to studying the horizon, just outside the window.

MEGAN WOKE UP alone in the cabin. She wondered what time it was. She hadn’t slept so soundly since, well, she didn’t remember. Lord, did she feel good. She stood and stretched her arms above her head, then bent at the waist and touched her toes. Ah, that felt so good. She cleaned herself up for the day and chose the outfit she wanted to wear. A green muslin gown with white trimmings. If it wasn’t too windy, maybe her dark green shawl to tie it all together.

She set off to find the Second Class dining room. Down one flight, or no, that wasn’t right. Megan closed her eyes for a moment and brought up the map of the ship in her head. Yes, that was it. She turned herself around and headed toward the grand staircase. What a beautiful sight it was to behold. The sun cascaded through the huge stained glass dome so brightly she had to shield her eyes. The sunlight sparkled off the mirrors located around the staircase. Little prisms of color danced along the walls. Lovely. She went up one flight to get to the dining room for the Second Class passengers. She entered the room and looked about. She selected a table so she

could see the comings and goings of other passengers. A waiter immediately appeared with cold water and butter pads on ice for the table.

“Coffee or tea, miss?” the waiter asked politely.

“Coffee please,” Megan replied. She looked over the menu, freshly printed for the morning of April 11, 1912. How funny to think Colin may have had a hand in printing it. Well, she was duly impressed. A different menu for every meal, for each restaurant. It boggled her mind.

“I’ll have the oatmeal porridge and milk, and some ham and eggs with jacket potatoes and some fresh bread. We will see how stuffed I am after all that before I go off and order more. Thank you.”

The waiter disappeared into the kitchen.

Brunch was a lovely affair which she was glad to have partaken, once she realized that everything she ate or drank, except spirits, were included with the ticket. She should have known that fact. How many times had she stated it out loud for ticketed passengers to hear? But she never really heard herself when she talked. Oh well, it was delicious any way she looked at it. Simply delicious.

She sipped her coffee and started planning the rest of her day. Once she ate everything she ordered, she really should go walk off some of it. She would go on up to the promenade deck to find the ladies from yesterday. She did so enjoy herself with all of them. This journey had already begun to hold great memories. What was in store around the bend was another question, which she was leaving to the good Lord above.

Should she go to the Royal Post after or before she caught up with her new friends? She was hoping that she could make friends with someone in the mail room to give her a good boost for a job when they hit New York. Maybe she could even get a job on the ship. Megan thought she could do something like that. She might enjoy not really having a home, but only the good ship beneath her feet, perhaps a sweetheart to leave her heart with every time she came and left port. What kind of life might that be? It sounded fetching. Yes, that made up her mind. Off to the mail room she went.

The mail room was located on G deck, so she took the elevator down to E deck, got out, and walked over to the service elevator to go down the rest of the way. The mail room and storage room were in the third and fourth compartments on that level of the bow. She entered the doorway and noticed a couple of men toting big bags filled with what she presumed was mail. There were hundreds of sacks piled one on top of each other like a huge pyramid. It was a lot of mail. She wondered how much mail each sack held. However much, it was very interesting.

“Excuse me, sir. May I ask you a couple of questions?” Megan asked politely of a worker walking by.

“Uh, sure miss. What can I help you with?”

“Well, to start with, where did all this mail come from? How do you go about sorting it all out? Do you have another holding spot for the mail or is this all of it? And what do you do with passenger mail? Do you deliver it here on board, or does someone else do that?”

The clerk stood dumbfounded for a second.

“Um, let’s see. This isn’t all the mail, so yes, we do have another storage area on board, and are you always this curious?”

“It seems to be a family trait,” said a voice from behind a crate as Lucas came walking around it. “Her brother is just like her. Blah, blah, blah. Good thing he is a newsman, or claims to be. I’m not sure what she can claim. I’ll take over here, Smitty.”

Lucas looked back at Megan with a smile in his eyes and said, "Now then, what were all those questions about? But most on my mind is how did you get here, on board? Colin made no mention of it, now did he? What happened to that job you loved so much? Now I'm the one with questions."

"I changed my mind," Megan said. "It's a woman's prerogative, you know. Now, will you answer my questions about the mail?"

"Do you really care?"

"Aye, I do. I want to get a job at the Royal Post there in America, and I thought I'd pick these gents' heads for an easier way to get involved with the right people from the start. So here I am."

"Here, come on through." He swung a bench top up and she stepped through. "I'll give you the grand tour. I've got a couple of minutes before I have to leave. This is where they start to do the separations for ship and land. Basically, you start by dumping those sacks over there and start sorting. Packages go to one place and little articles to a different area to be worked."

Megan realized that the five clerks worked together each doing what they did, while using a rotating system. It pleased her. It seemed no one would get bored with his job, since they traded so often.

"What do you mean, you have to leave?" Megan asked. "Are you rotating with someone soon?"

"I'm loading up the last tender ferry, the *America*. I have to pick up a load of passengers and mail in Queensland. They don't have a dock big enough for a ship this size, so we have to ferry our mail and passengers to and from."

"I hope you have a good ferry ride over and back, then. Will I see you tonight in the lounge with Colin? If I do see you there, I'll even save a dance for you," Megan said as flirtatiously as she could.

"Don't be holding your breath too long tonight, now, you hear. You might run out of breath and then you'll die. Keep your spirit up and your feet out of the water. Just a bit of advice for you."

Ding, Ding, Ding.

"Ho, that's my call. I'm off to Queensland. Glad to see you and all. I hope I helped with all your questions."

Megan watched as Lucas and the other clerks opened a hatch door in the wall of the mail room. She could see a small passenger boat had pulled alongside and men were throwing lines out to Lucas. He grabbed them and tied off the ferry. He and the other clerks laid a gangplank between the two ships and crossed it to load the mail bags bound for Queensland on to the other ship. After they were done, Lucas jumped on the ferry, threw back the lines and the other clerks hauled in the gangplank. The hatch door closed and Megan found herself left with the harried clerks who remained.

"Thanks and goodbye," she said and left to go up top to watch the ferry leave. She skipped the freight elevator and took the inside stairs to E deck then went down the hall to the passenger elevator to go up two more flights. She got out on C deck and went through the door to fresh air. She moved to the railing and stared out at Queensland. Her first, but certainly not her last country. It didn't look to be more royal than any other land by the seashore. Why name this piece of land for the Queen when she probably didn't even know it existed? All these questions and no one to answer them. Megan sighed and gave a small wave toward the *America* for Lucas.

ALICE FOUND MEGAN staring out toward Queensland from the railing on the port side. It was their last port of call before New York. "There you are, Megan. We've been looking for you, haven't we, Franny?"

"Sure, but only you have been looking for her. I'm just here with you."

"Well, it doesn't matter," Megan said. "I'm happy you found me. I was just watching the last bit of land we shall see for days now. Come have a gander." Megan turned back around to face the ocean. "Soon all we shall see is water. Water, water and more water. And then, a little piece of land that gets bigger and bigger, like that one is getting smaller and smaller. Soon, my friends, we shall see that lady statue that France gave to the Americas. A new beginning, a new life."

Alice laughed at Megan. "You should go into politics. You certainly have the bluster." Alice grew wistful. "I've been to America, you know," she said. "I was born there."

"Really?"

"I lived the first ten years of my life there. Then there was a terrible carriage accident. Both my mother and father died. I was thrown out the back and landed in a bramble bush. It cushioned my flight but still scarred me in both my body and my soul. After that, I was sent to England to my godparents, the Cheswicks, Lanie and Fletcher. I've been with them ever since. My life with them is where most of my memories are from. I don't really remember my parents very much anymore, mostly just as a presence that I felt."

"Lanie?"

"Helene. I couldn't say my H's very well back then, but Lanie came out and it stuck."

Frances rolled her eyes. "My mother finds it adorable."

"What else do you remember?" Megan asked.

"Well, I remember when Frances was a child. Such a little fuss. Not so different from now, I expect."

Frances chimed in, "But haven't I been a delight for you to adore and play with and dress up and put fro froes on and be your living doll? Which I love doing. Don't get me wrong. I just wish you wouldn't look at me like I was your little sister. I want it to be so much more than just your sister."

"You are, silly. You are my best friend. Who else can claim that title?"

"I guess."

Megan watched them with a little smile. "You remind me of me and my sister," Megan said. "Which is not that much different than having a brother, let alone four brothers. It's about right and wrong. Who is right and who is wrong."

"No, that isn't what I'm talking about," Alice said. "It is about choice of family. My family was given to me by circumstance originally and by choice now. Sometimes you get to choose your own family. By heart, not by blood."

Megan said, "Is that why you are still with them? You are nearly of my age and yet still unmarried like me. I've been working. Has that been your choice also?"

Alice took Megan's arm and linked hers into it. "Of course, silly. I have had offers, you know, but none I liked. I'm tired of staring at the water. Let's go play in water."

"What a grand idea," Frances said. "I'll let Momma know what we're doing and will meet you both at the pool in a half hour."

ALICE AND MEGAN arrived at their cabin the same time as a young woman coming from the other direction.

“Excuse me, *por favore. Oui?*” The young lady stumbled with her wordage.

“You must be Alexandria,” Megan said as they all entered the room. “I didn’t even hear you come in last night. I’m pleased to meet you. My name is Megan Mahoney, and this is Alice Pearce. We’re your cabin mates. My brother, Colin, told me about you.”

“Your brother?” Alexandria looked bewildered. “How does your brother know of me?”

“It’s a bit complicated,” Megan said laughing. “I’ll let him explain. He’s one of your father’s friends. He’s playing tonight in the lounge. You should hear him play the violin. Now that is beautiful. You should join us.”

“Oh, I would like this very much. Perhaps later on this evening. No?”

“Yes, he will be playing in the First Class lounge,” Megan replied.

“For, you see, my father is soon to arrive and escort me around the ship to meet people. The important ones like his first mate and sorts. He is very proud and wants to show me off. I am also thrilled. But I shall see you both tonight?”

“Yes, that’s correct,” Alice piped in. She already had her swimming clothes in her hand.

“Come along then, Megan?” Alice all but pushed her out the door.

Megan grabbed her pantaloons as she was swept away. She turned back to Alexandria and said, “Goodbye. I’ll come find you tonight.”

Alice shut the door behind them.

“Alice, wait up. Alice, please slow down. Alice?” Megan stopped where she was. Alice stopped too and turned around to face her. “Are you nervous, Alice? Is that why you ran out of there, practically dragging me? I thought she was pretty, and I loved her accent, and did you see that dress she was wearing?”

Alice moved to a deck chair. She sat down with a small thud. “Oh, why do I run when I’m uncomfortable? I think it’s when I have nothing to say that would be sensible. I am so sorry you had to witness this weakness of mine. It makes me feel so vulnerable.”

”If you just need to sit for a while, we can do just that. We can make Frances wait a little bit longer. And who says it’s a weakness?” Megan asked.

Alice said, “You’re so easy to talk to and I do need to talk about things going on. Mostly in my own mind, but still. I’m feeling very alone at this point in my life. I mean, here I am, old enough that I should be married, but I don’t want that.”

“What do you want?”

“I want a person I can call my own. Someone who thinks about me as much as I think about them. Do you even think that’s possible?” Alice was looking so earnestly at Megan. “Think, think, think, now I sound like you.” Alice laughed at her own admission. “I don’t really belong with the Cheswicks. I’m old enough I should be married and have babies. I’m returning to a homeland I can’t remember very well, and I’m still so wishy-washy in my own actions and words. I’m sorry. I’m a mess.”

Megan moved over and sat next to Alice. She held out her arms and Alice scooted over to be in them. She started crying and Megan let her. After a little bit, Megan reached into her pocket and pulled out a clean but well-worn handkerchief and handed it to her.



“I don’t even know why I’m crying,” Alice said. “I have so many emotions running through me I can’t see straight. Thank you for the much needed shoulder.”

“It’s all right. I always have a shoulder you can lean on or cry on in this case.” Megan patted Alice’s shoulder as they stood and resumed walking toward the swimming pool.

“It’s time for women only at the pool, isn’t it?” Alice asked.

“I think the women have it from three to five p.m. Just in time for the dinner appetizer time.”

“That makes this even more fun. I hope Franny finds us soon. Here we are.”

“OH, PAPA, IT is all so beautiful, and the Captain was oh, so very nice. I liked his beard. So trim.”

Her father laughed. She liked his laugh, a jolly ‘ho ho’ like Kris Kringle. He took her around to all decks of the ship, introducing her to everyone. Alexandria was having a marvelous time meeting everyone. He was a well-liked chap. He pointed out various things he either constructed or helped build. “And this is the Palm Room. Care for a cup of tea? Some cakes? We can sit here.” He indicated a table in front of him.

Alexandria sat and looked all about. The white wicker furniture was like something back home at an outdoor café, so she felt right at home. Such a wonderful ship this was.

“Yes, please Papa, I would like this very much.” It somehow felt more right to call him Papa than Jacob.

As their pot of tea was delivered to them, Alexandria wondered how he would fix his cup. Will he fix it like Mama did, with a little cream but a great deal of sugar, or like she did with a lot of cream but very little sugar?

She smiled watching him fix his tea. He grabbed the sugar bowl, placed one cube of sugar into his cup, and then proceeded to fill the empty space of the cup with cream. He stirred to get it a cloudy brown and took a sip, swallowed, and said, “Ahhh.”

Alexandria giggled. “You are like me, no? Or I am like you. We both like little sugar but a lot of cream.”

Jacob joined in with her laughter. “So right you are.”

A young man stopped outside the window of the café and waved to Jacob. A moment later, he stood at their table. He nodded to Jacob and smiled shyly at Alexandria.

“Hello again,” he said.

Alexandra looked at Jacob, puzzled. Had they met?

“This is my pal Colin,” Jacob said. “He helped with your boarding yesterday.” Jacob gestured for Colin to join them.

“Aye, I had to,” Colin said. He pulled a chair up to the table and sat down. “If I’d left it to him, you’d have been bundled aboard like a sack of mail. Let me welcome you aboard proper.”

He held out his hand and, when Alexandria placed her fingers in his, he smiled brightly. He shook it up and down and released it as if it were hot. “You’ve met my sister by now, I hope?”

“Your sister?” Alexandria wondered for a moment what he meant, but then it came to her.

“Oh, but of course. You resemble her very much. Your sister’s name is Magan, yes?”

“No, it’s Megan, like an egg sound.”

“Oh, Meegan,” Alexandria said smiling.

“No, not mee like mi, mi, mi, mi, miiii.” He broke out in song and a wonderful vibrato came at the end. “It’s like the egg, you have heard that long ago question, which came first, the chicken or the egg? ’Tis a vicious circle, one may never know.”

All three laughed at the joke, bonding them at Megan’s expense.

So this was her cabin mate’s brother. Megan hadn’t mentioned how handsome Colin was. Of course, she might not know. He was just her brother, after all. Alexandria could notice for both of them. Alexandria smiled at her father and Colin, talking about the ship and passengers, the mail and his violin, which never left his side. She listened and watched. Her life was so changed from only two days ago.

She thought of her mother and felt a deep pang that she would never see her again. She hoped Mama was at peace now after sending Alexandria off to be with Jacob.

Alexandria, at least, was glad. Her thoughts were interrupted by Colin asking, “Would you like me to finish escorting you around the ship? I’m sure your father has important things he could be catching up on? Hmm?”

“Do you have duties you need to attend to?” Alexandria asked Jacob. “I will be fine with Mr. Mahoney, if you need to see to them.” She smiled over at Colin.

Jacob leaned over and grabbed her hand. “Seeing you happy makes a man proud. Do well by her, lad. I’ll be seeing you both then later.”

Jacob left.

Alexandria smiled at Colin. “What part of the ship are you going to show me? I thought I’d seen everything.”

“Well now, did your Pa show you the library?”

Alexandria shook her head.

“It’s quite pretty with all the books lined up just so,” Colin said. “It’s a quiet place where we could spend some time together, getting to know each other a little better. All right?”

Alexandria tucked her arm into his and let herself be swept along, double timing her steps to keep up.

He stopped, dropped her hand from his arm and said with an apologetic face, “I’m going too fast for your legs. I’m sorry and will slow down to a stroll. I’m not on the clock at the moment. I want to enjoy my time with you.”

Alexandria smiled up at him. “I’d like that too. The library sounds grand. Shall we?” She tucked her arm in his, once again, and they strolled off.

# Chapter Thirteen

## 11 April 1912 — At sea

EMILY FOUND THE three women at the pool, just as Helene had said.

They were such a sight to behold. Three lovely ladies, all unaware of their beauty and half nakedness. *Titanic*, you seem to keep outdoing yourself for my pleasure. Emily's thoughts made the insides of her crotch tingle.

She placed a huge smile on her face as she entered the room and greeted them. "Ladies."

Her three friends looked over at her, all smiling at first, though Alice seemed to remember that she had left Emily last night in a huff and looked away. Several women at the other end of the pool, all much older, looked also and turned away, ignoring the young women. Bright sun shone through the portholes onto the water, and the reflections cast sparkles all about the pristine white walls.

Emily removed her wrap to reveal her pantaloons and took a step into the water. "Brrr. This thing may be heated, but it's not quite warm, is it? Did you all plunge in or was it slow and torturing? Hmm?" The water was up to her crotch. It seeped through her clothing as she entered the pool. She brought her hands up to cover her bosom and calm her nipples. They were hard as rocks. She didn't need the whole world to know how she was feeling.

She crossed over to the other women. Frances and Megan were busy playing some sort of twist game. Together they were making little eddies, swirling around as each girl, in turn, stayed in the middle and spun. Their laughter was loud and boisterous, echoing in the cavernous room.

Emily watched Alice. She had drawn herself away from the other women when Emily entered the room. She had a prim expression on her face, but Emily noticed that her eyes kept wandering to Emily's wet pantaloons. Emily removed her hands from her bosom. She didn't need the whole world to know how she was feeling, but Alice was a different matter. She saw Alice's lips part in a gasp. Her eyes swept up to Emily's, and Emily smiled.

The staid older women climbed out of the pool, their clumsy Victorian bathing suits hanging heavy and dripping. They frowned at the girls and left. Good. Now they had the place almost to themselves.

Emily got out of the water, donned her robe, reached for her purse, and walked over to the attendant. "Be a dear and go have dinner, early," she said under her breath, handing the woman the bribe. "You have a good half hour 'til the next shift."

"Yes, ma'am," the attendant said. She scurried away. She didn't even look behind her to see if the door closed.

Emily assessed the others in their wet swimming pantaloons. Frances, now she was a beauty. A little young but that had never stopped Emily from pursuing a romp. Her wet clothes clung to her tight little body like a glove, with no imagination needed. Megan, on the other hand, was too innocent for Emily's taste. Mind you, she too was a looker, with those long limbs and animated style, but she wasn't for Emily.

Alice took the cake. She was the one Emily wanted. She stood there, dripping wet, little droplets suspended on her tit, dripping off every few seconds. Oh, if only Alice would let her use her tongue to catch those drips. Emily shook her head and turned, taking off her robe.

Emily tossed her robe on a chair and threw her arms wide. “Now then, this place is ours for the next—”

She was interrupted by the dinner gong.

“For heaven’s sake.”

“They’re calling the horses to feed again,” Frances said.

“Good,” Megan said. “I’m starving.”

Frances and Megan pulled themselves out of the pool and headed toward the changing rooms.

Emily stood with her hands on her hips and looked at Alice, who remained in the water. “Well, I don’t want to leave yet. Care to stay with me Alice?”

Alice plunged under the water and came up sputtering. “I’ve wanted to put my head underwater this whole time. It felt so freeing there, under water, I mean. Now I’ll have to wash my hair. Um, Emily, will you help me with my hair in a little while? I don’t want to get out just yet either. You two run along. We’ll catch up with you both at the dining lounge in a bit. All right?”

Emily replied quickly, “Of course I’d be delighted to assist you. You two go on and we will catch up with you after dinner.”

“But when will you eat?” Megan asked.

“In a while,” Alice said. “Meanwhile, you go on up and meet the Cheswicks for dinner and tell them we will be along shortly.”

“If that means that I can eat in First Class again, I am all for it. Come on Franny.”

“No one calls me Franny, except Alice.”

“No one?”

“Well, not until now.” Frances giggled, grabbed Megan’s hand, and pulled her toward the changing rooms. “Meet you in a few minutes.”

ALICE WATCHED EMILY slip into the water on the opposite side of the pool and face her. They were the only two people in the room.

“Can you feel that?” Emily asked softly.

“Feel what?” Alice asked. She wondered if Emily could feel the beating of her heart from across the pool. They said that sound travels easier through water. Maybe vibrations did too.

“The feeling of the ship’s aura,” Emily said. She stroked gently toward Alice. “It has slowed down. Everyone must be getting ready for dinner.”

“Why did you ask that I stay?” Alice turned toward Emily and swam to meet her in the center of the pool.

“The exercise has been good, nice. Relaxing in fact,” Emily said. “But now it has stirred my blood. I think that now would be a good time to beg your forgiveness for my rashness last night and to apologize for letting my lustful emotions guide me instead of my heart.” Emily glided up alongside Alice.

The buoyancy of the water moved them closer than Alice had expected. With a swoosh, Emily was beside her, her leg between Alice’s legs. The distance between them closed. Emily

didn't take her eyes from Alice's face as she wrapped her other leg around Alice's thigh and came down on Alice's leg with the full openness of herself. The thin wet fabric of the muslin was no barrier between them. Alice's eyes grew wide as she felt Emily on her thigh. She knew that if she touched herself, she would be wet beyond that caused by the water in the pool. Her head rolled back and she closed her eyes.

Alice felt Emily's lips as they grazed her neck and then worked their way up to Alice's ear and then over to her mouth.

"Oh God, I am sorry," Emily said. "So very, very sorry. Can't you feel how very sorry I am?" She writhed back and forth against Alice.

Suddenly, whatever was buoying them up in the water lost its grip and they both went crashing down. Both of them were laughing as their heads broke the surface of the water.

"Now that's what I call chemistry," Emily said as she climbed the stairs to get out of the pool.

Alice admired Emily's backside as she slowly rose out of the water. "Why do you have to be so charming?" Alice asked as she still treaded water. "Will you dance with me tonight?"

"Yes. You can hear the band playing from my veranda. I'll dance with you there, under the stars. Tonight."

Alice got out and joined Emily. She pressed herself against Emily's wet body and felt it mold to hers. Emily kissed Alice sweetly on the lips.

"Tonight then," Alice said. "We should probably leave now, before anything else happens here. This is a public place. I'm not sure how much you tipped the attendant to stay away, but I'm sure our time is about up."

Emily said, "We have a little time to freshen ourselves up. I want to change into something a little more flattering so I can woo you properly. My skin is crackling now from the saltwater we just swam in."

It's marvelous that the pool is heated yes, but it's still saltwater. I hope it was a ruse for me to help with your hair? I know nothing of the process. Isn't that what we have servants for? I'll meet you in the dining room, and afterward, we will go back to my stateroom, yes?"

"All right. Yes, that sounds grand. I'm in need of a shower and to wash my hair. I'll see you in the dining room. Would an hour be sufficient time to change?" Alice then leaned forward to whisper in Emily's ear. Her body molded into Emily's side. Slowly, she gave a slight lick, just under Emily's ear, and whispered, "Mm, salty. Be sure to wash there. I mean to spend a little more time there tonight."

Alice straightened up, spun around and walked the other way. She knew her backside was being examined as she walked away. Keep watching, honey. Wait 'til you see the whole package. Smiling, she wrapped her robe around her and went to change.

FRANCES SAW ALICE and Emily entering the dining room as she and Megan were leaving. She walked up to them.

"Are you just now getting to dinner?" Frances spoke accusingly.

"Why, yes, we're just going to eat a little late, that's all," Alice said sweetly, smiling at Emily.

Frances's expression dropped when she saw the look of possession on Alice's face. She'd seen Alice gaze upon a few women in her life. She knew that look. It was just never directed at her.

Megan's voice broke through Frances's thoughts.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?" Frances asked.

"I said, do you want to go hear Colin play this evening? He'll be in the First Class dining lounge after ten o'clock. I have to go find our new roommate first, though. I told him that I would try to find her. Come with me Franny." Megan grabbed Frances's hand and pulled.

Frances looked back at Alice and saw her regard Frances's hand in Megan's. Frances gave a smirk, raised her eyebrows and stuck out her chest a little. It was about time Alice saw Frances with another woman, instead of the other way around.

"See you both there, right, after ten o'clock?" Megan asked.

Alice and Emily exchanged a glance that made them both laugh.

"Yes, yes we shall meet you there," Alice said. "A bit of a drink might do us all some good."

COLIN WAS SITTING with Jacob and Alexandria at a table near the back of the First Class dining lounge when Megan and her three friends arrived. He waved them over. They shifted their chairs so there was enough room to seat them all.

He was actually relieved to see his sister. Her friends were the real deal. They belonged in First Class. He was not sure he and his cohorts did. He felt like they were intruders. He introduced Jacob and Alexandria after Megan introduced the women.

One of the women ordered champagne. He thought her name was Emily. Colin noticed Jacob's uncomfortable look.

"Don't worry, old man," Colin said. "She's paying for it, not us. Drink up. Show your daughter a good time. Enjoy the fruits of your labors, though they were but twenty years ago or less."

"Yes, please drink up," Emily said. "Fill your glasses for a toast to our second wonderful day at sea. May the rest of our voyage go as smoothly, as we are sailing toward a new land for some, old home for others." Emily's voice grew melancholy. She thrust her glass into the air and brought it down so a little sloshed out the sides and onto the table. "Oops."

"Here, here," Megan said as they all drank the luxurious bubbly champagne.

Colin laughed at his sister's expression. "Don't you like it?" he asked.

"I love it," Megan said. "But it tickles my nose."

He turned to Alexandria. "Do you like champagne?" She nodded and he poured her some more. He really liked the way she gave him her whole attention. He wasn't used to that behavior from women. It was usually all about them, at least that was the way of his sisters.

And Catherine. Poor Catherine. He hoped she was getting over him, but she never did give him the attention Alexandria did. Even Megan and her friends gave each other more attention than Catherine ever gave him.

As Colin was about to ask Alexandria to dance, the orchestra quit playing. He glanced over to see what had happened to the music and he saw Wally approaching the table. Colin's stomach got a nervous twitch in it.

"Well, chap," Wally said, "it's time. Do you still want to play with us tonight? Richard has a date and wants to wig out as soon as you agree. So, what say you? Can I tell Richard he can go?"

“Yes, of course I would. But first, may I introduce you to my sister, Megan? And these are our friends, Emily, Alice, and Frances. I don’t know their last names. And this is Jacob and his daughter Alexandria.”

“Hello. It’s good of you to come hear us,” Wally said. “So many people think we’re invisible. I’ve seen you around the ship, Jacob.” Wally shook Jacob’s hand, nodded at the ladies, and looked over expectantly at Colin. Colin reached under the table and grabbed Violet from her case and started following Wally back to the staging area.

He turned around, and said, “Thank you all. Drink and be merry, and let’s see if I can’t entertain you a bit in the meanwhile.” He leaned over to speak to Alexandria. “Stay as long as you can. All right?” He turned to Jacob. “I’ll walk her back later if that would be all right with you?” He smiled at Jacob and, not waiting for an answer, followed Wally.

“It is an honor and such a privilege to be playing with you all this evening,” he told Wally. “Let’s have some fun tonight, shall we?”

Soon he was under the magical spell of the music he was helping to create. Megan sang out with such exuberance he thought they were back at Donovan’s again. She was probably getting a little tipsy. She was throwing waves like she was the queen after a performance, and she and her friends had their arms around each other’s shoulders like bosom buddies. It was very entertaining. The men held their dance partners loosely, dancing to the ragtime music that Wally and his mates played. Oh ho, how alive Colin felt. This was where he fit. These men were truly his mates. Even though he didn’t get hired by the Black Brothers, he’d be damned if he didn’t feel a good connection with each of these five gents. They were paid better than he was and they didn’t have other jobs on the ship like he did, but they still played beautiful music together. They blended so well, all crescendoing at the same time. These gentlemen were some of the finest musicians he had ever known.

Megan and her friends rose, finally, getting ready to leave, and that meant Alexandria would be leaving, as well. Jacob had left an hour ago, feigning age-old tiredness as his excuse. As soon as they finished up the number, Colin would ask for a reprieve for a moment and go and ask Alexandria to stay. Come on, keep the tempo, he reminded himself. He ended up waving goodbye to Megan with his head as his eyes searched for Alexandria’s to connect with his. There she was. Their eyes met. He raised his eyebrows and crinkled his nose while nodding his head to convey his meaning. She sat back down. He smiled and went back to concentrating on the musical piece at hand.

On his break, Colin went to Alexandria’s table, where she sat alone. Her face had such a lovely look to it. It was so delicate, with wide, brown eyes sparkling at him.

He said, “Thank you so much for staying. I wasn’t sure if you could understand what I meant by all the facial stuff going on. I’m not sure if your father told you but I’d like to escort you back to your cabin after I’m done, which will be in another half hour. If that’s all right with you?” Colin smiled and held out his hand.

“Yes, please, very much I would like that.” Alexandria put her hand in his and he drew it up to his lips and kissed the back of it.

“Only three more songs and I’ll be back,” Colin promised as he released her hand and turned to join his orchestra mates.

EMILY USHERED ALICE into her room and closed the door behind her. At last she had Alice alone. Those hours in the lounge were excruciating. She'd wanted so badly to take Alice in her arms. Now, she finally could.

"Here, let me help you with that," Emily said as she lifted the cloak from Alice's shoulders and let her fingers graze Alice's neck. "A little sherry, perhaps? To toast our way to the best part of our evening, umm, should we say the best part of the day?"

Alice answered, "If you like. I think I've had enough already but I won't deny that I'm parched. Yes, that would be lovely. I seem to be nervous again. Oh, fiddlesticks."

"I am not sure of the reason for your nervousness tonight. I will do anything you ask. I only ask that you come out on the veranda and dance in the moonlight with me. That should calm your nerves."

Emily took Alice's hand and led her outside to the private veranda that came only for the privileged, which, of course, the Westbrookes certainly were.

Emily pulled Alice into her arms and they started to dance. A few steps were all it took for Alice to melt into Emily's embrace and dance effortlessly with her. The music that was playing was an old English ballad. The feel of Alice's body moving against hers made Emily nearly weep with pleasure.

"I told you that you could hear the music from my veranda. This is absolutely wonderful to share it with you. You have made this voyage so very, very enjoyable. Many nights are left still to be lived." Emily whispered the last part. "By you, by us, by this."

Emily captured Alice's lips with her own and gave a sigh that turned into a groan. Alice opened her mouth a little and Emily took that as an invitation to move the kiss deeper. Her hands wrapped around Alice's waist and pulled her even closer than they already were. Deeper she sank, spinning around in the air, as she breathed in a mouthful of Alice and they sank together onto the veranda's settee, breaking the kiss.

Alice shook her head and said, "I could use a bit of that sherry now."

"Of course." Emily rose, poured a glass of sherry, and handed it to Alice. Alice's eyes shone brightly as her fingers touched Emily's. "That was nice, the dancing and that kiss," Alice said, taking a sip.

Emily sat beside Alice again. "Then, perhaps, you will enjoy this as well." Emily pulled a box from under the settee and placed it into Alice's hands. "Open it. It will look stunning on you."

Alice gasped. Just the reaction Emily had hoped for. Putty. Alice held up a hairpin that resembled a snowflake. Each tip held a round diamond cascading towards the middle creating a sunburst of diamonds with a huge one in the very center. Emily took the pin and gathered up a handful of Alice's hair and pinned it back. She dropped a kiss on Alice's shoulder.

"Shall we go back inside where I can open that champagne on ice that Ethan left for us and have another toast? We can still hear the music if I leave the windows open."

"Why on earth would Ethan leave you a cold bottle of champagne?"

Alice asked.

"In case."

"In case of what, may I ask?"

"Well, in case you decided I was forgiven for my blunder last evening." Emily tried to sound like a little girl. Emily pulled Alice to her feet and led her back inside where the champagne awaited. She filled two flutes. "I toast to us," Emily said. They clicked glasses and each took a sip. Emily put hers down, but noticed that Alice finished hers completely and set her flute next to



Emily's. Emily took Alice's hand and brought it to her face as she leaned in to take Alice's sweet lips once again. So luscious they were, Emily thought. Alice's lips fit to hers so well.

As she pressed her bosom into Alice's, Alice moaned and said, "Too many clothes on. I need them off now. Please."

Emily abided by her commands. She helped remove Alice's gown and then her chemise. Her corset set them back a little in time, but off it came after a few maniacal moments of untying, and Alice's breasts bounced into freedom and into the palms of Emily's hands. Oh my, such a wonderful heaviness to them. Emily dragged off her own chemise with no help from Alice, but she did get a little help with her corset after all. Naked breast on naked breast never felt so good, Emily thought.

"Here now, lie back," Emily said. "I'll take care of everything. Every little thing you wish, it is my command."

"IS THAT YOU, Alice?" Megan asked, concerned. "What time is it? Are you all right?"

"Yes, yes, I'm sorry for being clumsy and waking you up like this. Go back to sleep. I'll just be a moment. It's late."

"How late?" Megan mumbled.

"Quite late, I suppose. The ship is pretty quiet. I'm sorry I woke you."

"Oh, that's all right. I've been trying to keep an ear open so I could hear you, in case you needed me to help you with your corset."

"Oh, that's quite all right. I really don't need your help tonight. Thank you anyway." Alice quickly got undressed and climbed into bed.

"How did you do that so fast?" Megan whispered so she wouldn't awaken Alexandria.

"If you must know, I wasn't wearing one when I came in. Let's just leave it at that, shall we?" Alice asked.

"All right. I'm happy if you're happy." A moment passed. "Is it anyone I know? It has to be someone on the ship. You have nowhere else to choose from. Oh, I know, you secretly met with Lucas. That's why no one has seen him since Queensland. You're hiding him? Why?"

"Yes, Megan, why?" Alice asked with a touch of sarcasm. "Why would I, and what do you mean that Lucas is missing? It's true I haven't seen him since last night, but that doesn't mean that I'm hiding him for some unknown reason or that I'm sleeping with him. I think he's a married man. Is that what you really think of me? Good night, Megan." Alice rolled over in a huff.

"I'm sorry. You're right. I always do jump to conclusions and I didn't mean anything by it and I certainly didn't mean to imply that you were loose with your affection. That was not my intention. Again, I apologize and we'll talk in the morning." There was a long pause, then she heard the steady breathing of Alice. "Good night. Sweet dreams."

# Chapter Fourteen

## 12 April 1912 — Morning

THE NEXT MORNING the sun shone bright in the Second Class cabin. Maybe a little too brightly for Alice. It was pouring in from the round porthole making her head pound.

Dear Lord, what did she think she was doing? Sure, she was flattered with all the attention that Emily had given her the past few days, but why did she have to pick that little fight with Megan last night? She'd done nothing to be the cause of Alice's anger. Her anger was really at herself, Alice supposed, for getting into that situation where her bottom half was leading her path instead of her brain.

She knew better than to lead Emily on. But the champagne had started flowing and then a little sherry to top things off, and then some more champagne. The next thing Alice realized she was in Emily's bed with all her clothes off and a diamond pin in her hair, and she was in the middle of something she didn't remember starting. Emily had quickly reminded her of what needed to be done, so Alice finished her off and then Emily did the same for her. After a little snooze, Alice got up and left Emily sleeping like a baby. It probably was rude of her. Oh well, Emily would get over it, or she would not.

She did regret snapping at Megan that way, though. Alice loved spending time with Megan. She was such a true joy to be around. She almost regretted having to share her with Frances. She was the one who had urged Megan and Frances to become friends, though. She had no business pining over the fact that now they were. It was a double-edged sword she seemed to be falling on.

The cabin was empty. Megan and Alexandria must have been very quiet dressing and leaving this morning. Alice cleaned herself up, got dressed, and found her way to the Second Class dining room. She didn't feel up to explaining her late rising to the Cheswicks.

Alice did truly love Frances, but only as a little sister. She wished Frances could see that and move on. She'd thought Megan might be the answer, but Frances had seemed almost oblivious to Megan's charms. If Alice weren't otherwise occupied, she might be drawn to Megan herself.

What to do about Emily? There were a few days left in the voyage, so Alice could keep taking Emily's gifts and paying with her body. The hairpin Emily had given her last night was certainly stunning lying on Alice's hair. Should she stay and play for the rest of the voyage, or should she slowly back away from Emily and, at the end of the voyage, say goodbye? Emily was fun, but Alice sensed she had a dark side lying ominously beneath the surface.

It might be awkward if the Cheswicks and the Westbrookes remained close, though. Perhaps she could go back to her family's home in St. Louis and get a job. She could thank the Cheswicks for everything they had done for her, but she could explain that it was time to move on with her own life. They could sail away with Emily to Pennsylvania, and she would see them when they returned—without Emily. That would give Alice enough time to see if she could make it in America by herself. She could become a self-sufficient woman.

The thought was exciting, but frightening too. She wished she didn't have to do it alone.

Oh, heavens. She would stop being at Emily's beck and call, she would be less available to do things with her, and gradually their time alone together would diminish. By the time they reached New York, it would be nil. She should probably return the hairpin, too. In the meantime, she would spend more time with Frances and Megan, and she would by all means stop drinking. Every time it seemed she indulged, even a little, she ended up doing something crazy.

She liked this solution. She would be more in the company of Megan and Frances. It was a good course for her heart to follow. She would do what was right for her, and the future would take care of itself.

She sat absently stirring her tea, staring off into the Second Class dining room. She supposed she looked lonely, but the many women in her head kept her company.

"I thought I'd find you here, having a cuppa."

Alice's head jerked up. She was surprised to hear the voice that matched her thoughts.

"May I join you?" Megan asked.

"Yes, of course." Alice was relieved at Megan's friendliness. "I'm sorry I bit your head off this morning. I didn't mean to. Where is Frances? You two seem to be inseparable lately."

"I haven't seen her this morning. I have been searching for you."

"Why, to tell me how rude I was last night? Or to have me beg you for forgiveness for picking a fight with you? Either way I'm a cooked goose."

Megan laughed. "Possibly a silly goose, but not a cooked one. I forgive you. Wasn't much of a fight if you ask me. Next time tell me it's a fight and I'll be sure to participate. All right? Good." Megan sat down and ordered a cup of coffee from the steward. She leaned close to Alice and said softly, "I have thought about it most of the night. Then I realized what bothered me most. It was the smell. You know everyone has their own scent, whether it's put on by powder, oils, sprays, it is the way their own body smells fit into each other. That's when I figured it out."

Warily Alice asked, "Figured what out?"

"What your scent meant, when you came in. The way I see it, or in this case, smell it, either you borrowed Emily's perfume or you have been very close to her in the past twenty-four hours. I can still smell her on you." Megan breathed deeply in Alice's direction. "Yes, it still lingers."

Alice's face burned with embarrassment.

"So does this mean you have been leaving Frances with me so you two could go out and find men to do dalliances with?" Megan asked. "Is that it? It leaves me speechless, I must say." Megan sat back in her chair looking like she'd been clever to figure it out.

Alice stared. Was Megan truly as innocent as she seemed? Alice considered accepting the excuse Megan handed her. She could pretend she and Emily had been dallying with men and never let on that they were a different sort of woman. But Alice could have sworn Megan was one of them. Why else did Megan seek her out the way she had? For that matter, why else was Alice so drawn to her? Perhaps Megan was one of them, but she simply hadn't realized it yet. Perhaps she just needed a little hint.

Alice decided it was worth the risk.

"There haven't been any men, Megan. Just Emily."

"Okay, now I am confused. You say no men, just Emily?"

It didn't take long for Megan to figure it out. Alice could see it in the way her eyes widened and her jaw dropped.

"Does that mean what I think you're trying to tell me? That you and Emily are, are what? Lovers? Oh my. That does make sense of my smell idea."

“Now I’m somewhat confused myself,” Alice said. “You’re the one who approached me, after all, giving me that signal that you wanted to be special friends.”

“What signal? I don’t know about any special signal. All I did was ask to be your friend. What’s so wrong with that?”

“You asked me if I wanted a special relationship. In my circles…” Of course, Megan wasn’t part of her circles, Alice realized. Why would she know of their signals? “Well, nothing happened to let me know that’s what you wanted, and then Emily started paying me all this attention, and, oh, I don’t know. I’m having fun, and I’m not hurting anyone, yet. There is still a little of the voyage left. I’m sorry if my going off with Emily has hurt you. It doesn’t mean anything.” Alice gazed mournfully at Megan.

“My goodness. So, you and Emily, you and she, you and she have, umm, wow. I don’t know what to say.” Suddenly Megan sat straight up, as if startled by a thought. “Hey, what do you mean, you think I asked to have these things with you? I asked to be your friend. That’s all. Your friend.” Megan looked astonished. “Anyway, I don’t even know what a real kiss is. And as for those other things, I can only imagine.” She took a sip of coffee and dropped the cup back into the saucer. “And do you mean, if it weren’t for Emily, you would have wanted to do these things with me? Oh my. I need a minute.” Megan glanced about the dining hall where few people still lingered.

Alice had a feeling Megan was about to bolt. “Can we talk about this somewhere else?” Alice asked. “A more private setting perhaps? Let’s go back to our cabin so that we might be in a little more private arena and discuss this further, shall we?” Alice asked anxiously.

“Yes, splendid idea, let’s go back to our cabin where we can talk,” Megan said, repeating what Alice had just said.

Alice breathed a sigh of relief. At least Megan wasn’t afraid to be alone with her. She followed Megan from the dining room and down the corridor to their cabin. She was a little anxious about what might happen, but she followed anyway.

AM I ATTRACTED to Alice? Megan asked herself as she led Alice to their cabin. In that way? She did wonder why everything about this holiday surrounded Alice. Could it be? Now that she had seen what was possible between two women, well, not actually seen, but enough now to get an idea, Megan’s mind was whirling from one thought to another as she walked toward their cabin. She opened the door and was relieved that Alexandria was not there.

Alice shut the door behind them. Megan went to sit on her bunk, waiting. She wasn’t sure what to expect. Alice crossed the room to sit on her own bunk, opposite Megan.

Alice took a deep breath. “Okay, you may ask me three questions.” She seemed rather tense. “I know you probably have a million but let’s try to narrow it down to a small few that I can answer. Don’t be shy about your questions. If you’re curious, now is that time you have been waiting for. I am feeling brave enough to answer, but will you be brave enough to ask the questions?”

“I don’t want to play twenty questions with you,” Megan said, “but I would like to ask about certain subjects. Can I have three topics, instead of three questions?”

“Hmm, yes, I guess that would work. An open discussion on an array of subjects. All right.” Alice sat back on her bed and seemed to relax a little. A smile came upon her face. Megan couldn’t take her eyes off Alice’s mouth. Her smile was perfect. “What’s the first subject?”

“Kissing,” Megan said.

“Kissing, that’s your number one subject you want to know about?” A small chuckle escaped from Alice.

“Well, I don’t know what a real kiss is,” Megan said. “With someone I love, I mean. Or even like for that matter. I’ve read about it, I just have never experienced it. All I have for reference is my Uncle Max and my Aunt Cissy. He had his tongue down my throat in two seconds gagging me each time I saw him, and my tight-lipped aunt kissed me so puckered up it was disgusting, like she didn’t want to kiss me at all. So I would like to know the difference. I like you and, you know. You know?”

“I think I do know.” Alice looked surprised, but not reluctant. “I’m sorry. Come over here.” She patted the spot on the bed next to her.

Megan came over, sat down beside Alice, and closed her eyes, not really knowing what to expect. Maybe she should open them. Her eyes popped open. Her palms started to sweat. Great, that’s all she needed now. Worrying about her hands, she didn’t think about what else was going to happen. Alice took her hands and leaned forward, capturing Megan’s lips in a slight kiss, lips barely touching each other. Alice drew back to check on Megan.

“How was that? Anything you liked or didn’t like? I can do it again only a little longer maybe?”

Megan brought her hand up to her lips. “They’re so soft. I would have never guessed that. So soft. Yes, please.”

As Alice leaned over to kiss Megan again, a knock came upon their door. Both backed up, startled at the noise. Megan scrambled off the bed over to the dresser with her back turned away from the door so whoever it was could not see her face. How red it must be from embarrassment of being caught doing something that wasn’t morally right, but felt perfect.

“Here you are,” Frances said. “Good, you’re both here. I’m glad to finally find you. Seems I kept missing you. Alice, why do you look funny?” Frances asked suspiciously. “Anyway, we have been invited to have our photographs taken and we each get a copy as gifts from Emily. I’m very excited. Megan, do you have a silk dress? I would loan you one, but I don’t think it would fit you. Alice is nearly your size. Perhaps one of hers? Alice, why don’t you wear that golden one that shows off your shoulders and your neckline so much? I have the most darling hairpin that will go with it.”

“My, that is news,” Alice said. “What time did you say? What shall I wear? That gold one? Really? What do you think Megan? Megan?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. What have you been saying? I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Megan was still reeling from being kissed by a woman. She really, really liked it. How was she supposed to listen to these two jabber like parrots when her whole world had been shifted?

“A photograph of the four of us women that will be taken down at the photographer’s studio at two o’clock,” Frances said. “I’m sure you know where that is, don’t you?”

“Yes, I know where that’s located. But who is the fourth? And what shall I wear? I have nothing very suitable except my hat, which I love.”

“Emily’s the fourth, and I already told you to try one of Alice’s dresses,” Frances said. “I’ll help you pick one out. It will be fun. But first let’s get Alice ready. Then we will move on to you. Alice, go pull out the gold one, please.”

“All right,” Alice said. “I suppose I would like a memento of this voyage, to look back fondly on.” She glanced at Megan, and Megan blushed again.

Alice arose to open her trunk and pulled out a few items. A golden dress was laid down on the bunk.

“My peacock comb would go perfect with that dress. It sparkles when the light catches it just like your hair,” Frances said.

Alice is going to be stunning in that, Megan thought. Not for me, of course, but for Emily. Maybe a little for me. She could hope. Megan sat on her bunk trying to hide her sudden longing. Must she hide what she was feeling for this woman now that they had kissed? She wanted to do it again. But kissing would have to wait.

# Chapter Fifteen

## 12 April 1912 — Afternoon

THE FOUR OF them met in front of the photographer's studio, all looking their best. They did so want to look good for this remembrance of the maiden voyage of *Titanic*. Alice was stunning, Megan thought. Her gown flowed around her legs like she was floating on air when she walked. Megan couldn't keep her eyes off her. Her light brown hair was swept up onto her head and held in place by a delicate comb that was shaped like a peacock's tail. Each feather held a beautiful colored jewel that seemed to gather the light around her hair and send twinkles that cascaded around when she moved. She was so beautiful. Megan was in awe and was just realizing this fact. She turned, annoyed, as Frances started fussing with her gown.

"Just because you dressed me, don't think that gives you permission to paw at me now. Do we have an understanding?"

"Yes," Franny replied. "But I wasn't pawing. You have a thread coming down your back and I wanted to get it off of you. That's all, silly. You look wonderful. Wait 'til you see yourself in the portraits. You'll see."

Megan did feel beautiful in Alice's gown. It was the most perfect blue she could have picked out. She loved the color of aqua and here she was surrounded by it. The fit was tight, but it was flattering. She was a bit larger than Alice, so her cleavage showed a little more. She could hardly wait to see what the camera caught.

The photographer came into the front parlor to welcome them. He walked over to Emily with a curious look on his face.

"Is there a problem, sir?" Emily inquired.

"No, no there isn't one at all. I have seen the four of you on the promenade deck and had wished to do a photography session with you all, and here you come to me. I am honored." He gave a slight bow. "Please, please, come follow me." He hurried into another room. He was a funny little man with a huge moustache and a potbelly hanging over his pants. It was amazing how he could get around the studio as light footed as he was, but he did appear to enjoy his job.

He grabbed a straight back chair and set it down in the middle of a wide circle on the floor. He gestured to Emily to sit down and to the other three to gather around, with Alice directly behind Emily, Megan on the left, and Frances on the right.

"Now lean in just a little. That's it. Don't move."

He struck a piece of flint onto a pile of dusty chips and counted to seven. He looked through his lens, made an adjustment, and poof! A light flashed and up raised a puff of blue smoke.

"My goodness." Megan coughed. "Does that happen every time you take a picture? Is it dangerous?"

"You can't take a photograph without the flash," the man answered. "It's not dangerous if you do it right."

"What are those dusty pebbles?"

"Megan," Alice laughed. "Leave the man alone. Let him do his job."

“It’s magnesium oxide, miss. All right, this time let’s put all four of you in chairs and I’d like you to point your feet out toward me like a fan. Would you all kindly do that?”

“Is there an order you’d like us in?” Emily asked.

“Yes, good idea. All right, you stay there, and you move here, and you two trade places. There now, that’s delightful. All right then, bring your arms down your sides and clasp them together in your laps. There, perfect. Hold it there. No, your hands need something to hold. Flowers, yes, just let me go gather some up.” He ran across the room to a bouquet of assorted flowers, whisked them out of the vase, and went down the row of girls. He handed a few tulip stems and some greenery to Emily. To Alice, he gave a single red rose. He gave some daisies to Frances, and that left the purple lobelia for Megan. She brought the flowers to her nose and sniffed. No smell. They must be old. “All right then, steady. Squeeze your arms in tight and lean slightly forward. Good. Now hold still.” He lit the fuse with the striker again and counted. Poof!

“Madame,” he said, addressing Emily, “do you wish for some other shots, perhaps?”

“Yes, I would like a few more. One of the two of us.” Emily pointed to herself and Alice. “And one of the three of them together. Thank you, yes that would be lovely. We will all receive a copy, won’t we?”

“Most excellent then. Why don’t we have you both step over here.”

Megan couldn’t really blame Emily for wanting a photograph of herself alone with Alice. The photographer placed them in front of a large mural of an ocean view sunset.

“Why don’t you use the real thing?” Megan asked. “We could just go outside and see the same view almost. The sun is out and it’s still a nice day out there, so could we go outside?”

“No, no that would be disastrous,” the man said. “Direct sunlight is very hard to work in. There are too many shadows all over the place that move with each minute. Here, I can create my own mood and control the lighting. Here, I am a god. Please do not disturb anything and, if you can help yourself, don’t touch anything. You must abide by my rules. My cameras, my studio, my work. *Comprende*?”

“Yes, sir,” Megan said. “I’m sorry. I always ask a lot of questions. I had no idea about the sunlight. I never really thought about it. I seem to get a little presumptuous at times. It’s one of my, ah, flaws that I’m trying to improve.” Megan rambled on but was cut off by Alice.

“Well, I think it’s adorable.” Alice smiled and her eyes had that twinkle to them.

Megan smiled back, feeling warm inside. She hoped she hadn’t blushed.

“All right then, ladies, let’s put the two of you here.” He pointed to a spot on the floor. Alice stood on the spot he had indicated. Alice held out her hands and Emily took them into hers.

“You look beautiful,” Emily said, smiling at Alice. “But I wonder, the hairpin? It is a striking piece. But why did you not wear the snowflake?”

Alice put her hand to her hair. “Oh, I borrowed this hairpin from Frances. It matches the dress. I thought the snowflake was a bit much with everything else for my outfit. I hope you don’t mind?”

If Megan didn’t already know about the special friendship the two women had, she would have known it then. They looked like women in love. She glanced at Frances to see if she had noticed anything. She had, and she clearly wasn’t happy about it, but she didn’t seem surprised. Was Megan the only one who didn’t know about special friendships between women? And who was Frances’s pout about? Alice? Or Emily?

“All right, hold it there please. Do what you just did. Hold it. Look at each other. Keep holding hands. Yes, that’s it.” Poof! Another flash and another cloud of blue smoke rose up.



“Now, one of you sit and the other stand behind. Good, now lean down and pretend to whisper something into her ear. There, that’s it. Perfect. Hold it.” Poof!

“Goodness gracious,” Frances said. “How many photographs are you taking?”

“Right, that’s enough of the two of you. Now let’s get the other two in here and do it again. I hope you were watching. All right, you and you here, and you looking at them. Raise your arms like you are describing something. You know, talk with your hands. Good, hold it, hoold it.” Poof! The blue smoke rose above in a circular pattern once again. “All right, how about this time I put you here, and you and you over here, facing each other? Hold it.” Poof! “Good, good, these will be available for your review here tomorrow afternoon, after two p.m., then. Sign here, madam, and here with your cabin number and I shall get started on these at once. Thank you for your time and graciousness.” He bowed and stepped back, then wandered away completely.

The women left the studio and gathered in a small circle all talking at once and laughing. Alice pointed to some deck chairs and the others followed.

“I certainly hope he got some good shots, with our best side showing, of course,” Emily said haughtily.

“Which is my best side?” Frances asked. “This?” She posed one way. “Or this?” She posed in a different manner completely, mostly showing off her backside doing her best to pose sexy.

They all laughed at her and then started a discussion about her derrière. The dinner bell gonged with two short rounds, indicating that the meal would be served in a half hour. They wandered toward the elevator. They all rode up to A deck and got out to walk Emily to her suite. They said goodbye to her and Megan and Alice walked Frances down to her suite, and then they descended the grand staircase to their own room.

ALICE CLOSED THE door to their cabin and looked over at Megan. “Would you like another lesson on kissing? We do have a little time.”

“All right, if you think it’s a good idea? I wasn’t sure the way you were eyeing Emily in those pictures we just took,” Megan said.

“But, I was thinking of you,” Alice said. She had thought of nothing else since they were interrupted by Frances. Megan’s appearance in Alice’s dress was very distracting. Even now, she had difficulty keeping her eyes away from Megan’s magnificent bosom.

She took Megan’s hands and drew her down to her bed. Alice leaned forward to capture Megan’s lips with her own. How nicely they fit. It felt so wonderful. She wondered if Megan was feeling the same vibrations in her soul as she was. Alice had decided to let Megan take the lead. If she wanted more, she would take it. Her body would show her what she needed.

Alice felt hands on her backside, and her kiss turned into a smile. Megan wanted more. The hands moved to Alice’s front and stopped. “I don’t know what I’m doing,” Megan said, “but it feels good. I love the way your mouth feels with mine.”

Alice kissed her to shut her up. “No talking please, unless you can tell me with your tongue.” Alice kissed her again and probed just a bit with her tongue to see how Megan would react. Her insides tingled as Megan’s tongue tentatively touched hers. She reminded herself to let Megan take the lead. We have time, she kept telling herself. She wanted to touch Megan in certain places but she dared not. Let Megan find her pleasures on her own. She would just guide her. My Lord, this was harder than she had ever imagined. She wanted to hold Megan’s breasts, to feel

the full weight of them in her hands. She brought her hands up Megan's back and pulled her closer. Her palms came up Megan's sides to her bosoms.

Stop! Alice pulled back. Megan was breathing heavily, her breasts rising with every intake of air, her eyes watching Alice, so eager. Lord help her.

What was she doing? Megan had never even been kissed before today, and here Alice was almost ravishing her with no finesse at all. They needed to stop.

Alice sat up. "My dear, there's so little time before the dinner hour. I want my first time with you to be very special."

"I already know it will be. I'm willing to skip dinner, how about you?" Megan said breathlessly as she went to kiss Alice once more.

"No. I need to make it right for you. It's not time yet. We have our whole lives ahead of us. Patience, Megan, it's a virtue." Alice kissed her quick.

Megan sighed. "Yes, but why does dinner have to be now?"

# Chapter Sixteen

## 12 April 1912 — Evening

MEGAN LOOKED AT her friends gathered at the table after dinner. “Colin mentioned that he’d be playing in the Second Class lounge tonight. Would anyone like to join me there?”

Alice smiled over at Megan and said, “It does sound like fun. They might play that song I’ve been listening for. You know the one that goes like this, hum, hum m hum.”

“Yes, we remember,” Megan said quickly, cutting her off from humming more. Megan grinned at Frances and tried not to laugh. Alice joined in their smiles, though she wasn’t in on the joke.

“Why would we go down there?” Ethan asked. “Just for your brother? I like you and everything, you know, but it is Second Class.” Ethan gave a small jerk, as if he had been kicked from under the table.

Emily smiled sweetly over at him. “Perhaps we can persuade this group to play that little game? Hmm? The one we played when you met Geoffrey?”

Ethan smiled.

“Yes, we will join you, won’t we Ethan?”

“Yes, that does sound fun,” Ethan said through his teeth.

They were all laughing when they entered the Second Class dining lounge.

Megan compared the two dining areas she had been to. They were alike in the décor of the etched window panel screens and the wood brocaded chairs. The tables were still covered in white linen but the plates were of a different design. They also had folded the napkins on top of the plates like little pyramids. All very elegant, and it ran the width of the ship. They could sit on either side they wanted.

“This isn’t so bad, now is it Ethan?” Emily asked.

“No, I suppose not,” Ethan replied. “Let’s get to drinking so I can forget where I am and have some fun.” He went to the bar and talked with the waiter.

They sat down far in the back and waited for others to arrive. A waiter arrived with two pitchers of beer and six mugs. Ethan followed and poured the brew into the glasses. Megan was busy handing them out when Colin arrived, holding hands with Alexandria.

Megan said, “Good, you are both here. Just in time for the first toast. Excuse me sir, but we need one more glass please, thank you. Now, everyone, here is to you, my brother Colin, for a fine fare of music that you will play. Drink up, there is more to go around.” Megan drank her whole glass.

“My goodness, it’s good and cold,” Ethan said. “Don’t know why the English like their beer warm. I do not, but it’s all right, as long as you keep drinking.”

Round two progressed with more toasts and more pitchers. Finally Colin said, “No more for me, I need to keep some wits about me. I do have to play tonight.”

“No, you really don’t,” Megan said with the bluster of two full glasses of beer in her belly. “You have no promises to keep to anyone but yourself. You are not a member of the orchestra so you don’t have to go play. You want to go play. There’s a big difference.”

“Well, before you leave,” Emily said, “could I entice you with an experiment on kissing? Interested, hmm?”

Megan’s ears perked at the idea of kissing. The idea of someone else’s lips on hers, besides Alice’s? Hmm.

Colin replied, “Well, I think it depends on who is doing the kissing. I have to tell you right now, I won’t kiss my sister. Do I get to kiss you?”

“All in good time,” Emily said. “You may not know this, but Ethan and I are twins. The reason I want to do this little experiment is that I’ve always wondered, being a twin, whether we do these things alike, and I wonder if it is the same for all siblings. Kissing, that is.” Emily smiled. “You and Megan for instance. The only way I know to find out if you kiss alike is for one person to kiss you both and compare. I will not be kissing my brother either, in case some of you were wondering. Ethan and I already know we have different kissing styles.”

“I get it,” Colin said. “I don’t have to kiss my sister, but you do.” He howled with laughter.

Megan’s cheeks got hot at the thought of it. Kissed by two women in one day? She could hardly wait.

“Why don’t we four set our chairs in a row and each sit down?” Emily asked. “Me, Ethan, Colin, and Megan. Each one of us will take a turn kissing the others. Kiss, then switch, kiss, and then switch again, like trading dance partners.” They set up their chairs as directed. “Oh, don’t forget to drink in between, that’s very important. Then we will tally up the scores to crown our best kisser. Are you all game?”

“Yes, it sounds like fun,” Frances said. She turned to Alice. “And you’re not my sister.” She smiled brightly at Alice.

“Now, it’s my game,” Emily said, “so I will go first.”

Emily rose, took a huge swig of her beer, and wandered over to Colin. Before leaning down, Emily looked at Megan and smiled, as if she knew how anxiously Megan awaited her turn. Emily leaned down to put her mouth upon Colin’s. For a moment nothing could be seen happening, but then Colin took over matters and pulled Emily onto his lap.

“Say,” Colin said, finally raising his head, “I like this game.”

“Well, umm, yes,” Emily said, pushing herself up from Colin’s lap, “that was lovely. Let’s move on.” She stumbled back to her glass and drank hungrily. She set it down and stood before Megan’s chair.

“I’ve not had but a few kisses in my lifetime,” Megan warned, “so I’ve not had the practice of most, I expect.” She closed her eyes as Emily’s mouth came down on hers. Another pair of soft lips, and she felt a tongue slightly probing an invitation, much gentler than Uncle Max. She opened her mouth slightly, and Emily’s tongue swept in and just about devoured her. She moved her tongue to meet Emily’s and the two brushed. No one had told her about this. This feeling of, she wasn’t sure, but she liked it. She was just about ready to do like Colin and pull Emily into her own lap when the kiss abruptly came to an end. Megan touched her lips. She was certainly receiving an education this day.

“All right then,” Emily said breathlessly, “that was, both of you, lovely. Just lovely.” She sat down and put her fingers to her own lips. “Who’s next?”

Ethan rose and started over to Colin. Emily said, “Ethan,” and he veered instead toward Megan. She smiled brightly up at him, her cheeks glowing hot.

Ethan leaned down and put his lips on hers. Hmm, they were softer than she thought they would be. There was no tongue probing, like with Emily. It was just a brotherly kiss, really. He finished quickly, stood back, and turned to Colin.

Colin sat there looking a little scared, and Megan tried not to laugh. He hadn't thought about the whole agreement. He'd thought only about kissing the women, not of kissing Ethan. He made a mad dash for his glass. Draining it, he said, "More please." He drank down another, straightened his shoulders, and said bravely, "I'm ready if you are."

Ethan lowered his mouth to capture Colin's in his. Ethan seemed more excited about kissing Colin than he had been about kissing Megan, and Megan wondered if he and his sister were twins in that manner too, in preferring to kiss their own gender. How curious. She'd never even known there were people like that, and now she seemed to be surrounded by them.

Colin, however, was having none of it. He kept his face scrunched up tight and his lips locked as if Ethan were trying to poison him. Ethan gave up, and Colin expelled a huge sigh of relief.

Ethan exclaimed, "My Lord. It wasn't that bad. I'll have you know I have been told by many that I am a fabulous kisser. Don't listen to him ladies. You can all try me yourselves and then we will decide." Ethan walked back to his chair and sat down.

A laughing Alexandria stood and said, "Oui, I would like the opportunity to kiss. Let me be next. I like this game. Just let me finish my beer and I will start with you." She pointed at Ethan and moved her finger down the line until she got to Colin. "And I shall finish with you."

Alexandria giggled as she kissed Ethan and Emily and Megan. By the time she got to Colin, which was her goal all along, her face was flushed. She was a dainty girl, and young, and she'd had too much beer and too many kisses in far too short a time. She had barely touched her lips to Colin's when she suddenly put a hand to her mouth and bolted from the room.

"Hey, wait." Colin jumped up and ran after her.

"Oh dear," Alice said. "We're down to only one gentleman."

"That's all you ever had," Ethan said, and Emily slapped him on the arm.

Alice rose and started toward Ethan, but first glanced down the line at Megan and Emily. She winked.

Megan caught her breath, but she heard Emily gasp at the same time. Megan peeked at her. She was smiling. Which of them was Alice's wink intended for? Emily thought it was for her, but Megan wasn't so sure.

Alice gave Ethan a quick brotherly kiss and moved on to Emily, who opened her arms wide. Alice placed her hand on the base of Emily's neck and pulled her close. Megan was close enough to see their lips meet and move and she could tell when their tongues touched. Megan licked her own lips and awaited her turn.

Finally Alice stood before Megan. She gave Megan a smile as if to say, relax, it's just me. Megan smiled back and tried to send her a look that said, yes, please kiss me. She closed her eyes and waited. Alice leaned down and captured Megan's lips in a soft kiss, barely grazing but oh so electrifying. Megan wanted more. She opened her lips and felt Alice's tongue. The kiss deepened and Megan found herself lost in the feel of Alice's mouth. Oh, how they fit.

Alice broke the kiss and stepped back, wobbled a bit, and said, "Where's that brother of yours? I need to do some comparishoms." Her speech slurred a bit.

"I'm right behind you," Colin said, returning to the group. "Alexandria's getting some fresh air."

“There you are,” Alice said. “Give me those Mahoney lips. I’ll tell you if they drip like honey or not.” She grabbed Colin’s jacket and pulled him to her. She latched her mouth to his and appeared to suck the life out of his face.

Megan watched in dismay. Was she going to have to worry about Colin too?

“Whoa, whoa, slow down, you wild thing, you,” Colin laughed. “I already have one sick female on my hands. I don’t need two. I just came back to grab Violet.” Colin stuck his hand under the table and came out with his violin case. Colin gave Wally, the conductor, a wave and took his leave with Violet.

Ethan stood up at this point and said, “I think I shall adjourn to the Turkish baths. I was meeting some others there after midnight and it’s that time now. It has been a pleasure. Thank you for the most enjoyable experiment. Emily, I’m sure you will give me the details of the tally of the votes.” He bowed and did a military about face and walked away.

“So, it’s just us girls, once again,” Emily said. “That was a delightful experiment. Did anyone learn anything? I must say that you all have incredibly warm, soft lips. It was a pleasure I will think about for years.”

“Wait,” Frances wailed. “I never got a turn. It’s not fair.”

So they all remained sitting and let Frances kiss them one at a time. Only Emily appeared to enjoy it, but even she had lost much of her interest. “I’m tired,” Emily said. “Would someone escort me to my suite?” She glanced at Alice.

Megan felt a sense of let down as she waited for Emily and Alice to go off together again, like they had last night.

But Alice didn’t speak. Instead, Frances said, “Yes, I will. You are on my way anyway.” Frances stood up, wobbled a little, and grabbed for Emily to steady her. “Hold my hand so I can help you, Emily. Oops, it seems that the drink has gotten the better of me. Thank you for helping me. Oh, that’s right, I’m supposed to help you. Ha ha to you.”

As they stumbled out, Frances said, “You know, you have the most amazing lips. They are so soft. Do you realize how soft they are? No, of course you don’t. They’re your lips. You’ve always had them. Hee hee.”

Emily turned back to Alice, raised her eyebrow, mouthed something, and nodded.

Megan looked at Alice, but Alice did nothing to indicate she agreed or had even seen. She simply took a drink from her glass and watched them walk away.

Megan turned to Alice and said, “Are you sure you’re all right? You look a bit pale.”

“No, no, I’m fine, but I do think I should stop drinking. I’m thinking a stroll about the deck should suffice in helping me gain my wits about me. Join me.” She strung her arm through Megan’s and tugged her along with a slightly uneven gait.

“We have to settle up our bill,” Megan said. “I’m sorry you never figured out that song that has been in your head, and I’m also sorry we didn’t get to hear Colin play again. Alexandria must really be sick. We will have to be quiet tonight, all right Alice?”

“Yes, of course, I know how to be quiet, especially in the moment.”

“What moment?” Megan asked.

“You know, that moment. When, oh dear. Oh no, my dear, I thought you were talking about...” Alice shook her head and started for the door.

“Wait, we haven’t paid yet.” Megan made a motion for the steward to come over.

“Sign Emily’s suite number,” Alice said. “It was her bloody idea to turn that kissing game into a drinking game too. Have her pay for this.” She made a sweeping motion with her arms, but

somehow kept going around in a circle. “Oops.” She stumbled and tried to pick up her wrap, which had fallen to the floor.

“Here, let me help you with that.” Megan took Alice’s wrap and put it around her shoulders. “That should make you feel better.”

“No.” Alice took the wrap off and fanned herself. “Isn’t it hot in here?”

“Let’s go out and take that walk you desired a minute ago,” Megan said. “That will help you clear your head.” She quickly signed the steward’s ticket and bent to rescue Alice’s wrap, which had fallen to the floor again. “Come along.”

Megan opened the door, and they stepped out into the night. The deck was small, but there was plenty of fresh air and a rail to lean upon. “Here, stand here and hold on,” Megan said. “Let the wind blow through your wonderful hair.” They watched the moonlight catch the top of the waves that seemed to glisten and twinkle just for them.

“Is that what you do every night?” Megan asked softly. “Go to her? I have noticed you stay out far into the morning.”

Alice looked at Megan with a worried frown, but she said nothing.

“I know it really is none of my business,” Megan said, “but I so desperately do not want to jeopardize our friendship. I’m thoroughly enjoying where it has been headed so far.” Megan wondered how much she should say, but their journey would last just a few more days. She decided to risk it. “Just how far are you willing to go with me? I would like to find out, but I will not stand to be a second helping for you. I warn you, I do not take feelings lightly. You need to finish what you started with her before you start something else with me. Are you sober enough to understand me?” Megan looked directly into Alice’s eyes.

Alice still stared at Megan and did not speak.

Megan sighed. “You aren’t, are you? Come on, you won’t remember this in the morning. Let’s go on home.” She led Alice down the stairs to their deck.

Alexandria was already asleep when they came in. She wrestled a bit with her covers, rolled over, and snuggled back into a slight snore. Megan started to get undressed, aware of Alice watching her as she removed her dress, slowly, until her chemise was all she had on.

Alice suddenly jumped up. “I have to go,” she whispered. “I have unfinished business. Don’t wait up for me. I’ll see you in the morning.” Out the door she swept.

“Oh.” Megan dropped onto her bunk. She knew where Alice was going but she didn’t know why. Unfinished business? Either she was running to Emily to spend the night with her, or... Could it be? Would Alice really call off what she had with Emily for Megan? God, she hoped she was not just the greener pasture. They still had a couple more nights, at least, on *Titanic*. She’d heard the Captain say they should arrive on Tuesday. Hours ahead of schedule was the boast. It could take a few days longer, if it were up to Megan. Tomorrow was Sunday already, or rather, today.

Was what Alice had with Emily just sex? It was just about sex, wasn’t it? Oh, her head started to hurt. Stop thinking. Whatever will be, will be the right thing. Think about something sacred, she told herself. Yes, that would make her sleepy and stop her from thinking about Alice and the way her lips still tingled from their kiss and about what Alice was doing right then with Emily.

Quit it. Sacred. Something sacred, Megan. Think about church.

“KNOCK, KNOCK, YOU still up?”

Emily arranged herself on the cover of the bed with nothing on but a bit of lace covering her most private parts. “Come in,” she said softly.

The door swung open wide. Alice stood there, her mouth slightly open as if she couldn’t believe the beauty she was seeing. She closed the door and leaned with her back against it.

“Um, hi,” Alice said. “I didn’t think I’d be so late, but...”

Emily could see Alice swallow, with desire, she thought. It was nice to know she had the power to move a beautiful woman like Alice.

“I—I really can’t stay,” Alice said. “I’m very tired and I’ve had a bit to drink, and I just want to go back to my room and lie down. All right?”

Emily raised an eyebrow. Was it desire she saw on Alice’s face? Or was the girl nervous?

“What I mean to say is that you look lovely lying there waiting for me to come ravish you as I have in the past,” Alice said, “but I can’t do this tonight. I just came by to tell you. Uh, goodbye and thank you.” She tried to curl around to the door.

Emily was up in a flash and pushed the door closed before Alice could get it open.

“Just what exactly are you trying to say to me? That you like me, you liked to fuck me once upon a time, yesterday, but now you won’t? You can’t? What do you mean, you can’t?”

“I’m sorry,” Alice said. “I can’t do this anymore. I need time. It’s not you, it’s me. I don’t think you are the one, you know. Can’t you feel it too? Or then, I don’t think I’m the one for you.”

“How dare you. Coming into my room and telling me I’m not good enough for you. Please leave at once. Go on. Don’t even think you are going to get away with this little treatment of yours tonight. I will not stand for it. Oh, oh I am so angry with you. I don’t want to see you for the rest of this voyage. Don’t you realize I can get you in so much trouble? Walk lightly, my lovely, and keep watch over your shoulder for me to appear.” Emily opened the door and stepped back. “Now leave,” she shouted and slammed the door behind Alice.

“What the fuck was that?” Emily shrieked. “Did I just get brushed off? Or did I do the brushing? Just like that?” She snapped her fingers.

Still snapping her fingers, Emily ranted around the room. She poured herself a jigger of brandy and threw it down her throat. There, that burned, just like she did. Burn her. She thrust her fists high in the air. No one does that, not to Emily Westbrooke.

She paced about the room, each time around calming herself as she circled. There, there now, all was not lost. There was plenty of the voyage left to either win sweet Alice, or drop her, like Alice was trying to do her. Now that she thought hard about the situation, Emily realized Alice probably was tired. She didn’t hold her liquor very well. Well, she held her licker well, but not her liquor, Emily thought, and she laughed. Back to the problem at hand, though. Maybe Emily herself had a little too much to drink too. She should just go to bed and address it all in the morning.

She pulled off the lace and got dressed in something more comfortable for sleeping. She turned off the light and crawled into bed, pulled the covers up close, and snuggled down to get warm. Emily was asleep within minutes.



# Chapter Seventeen

## 13 April 1912 — Morning

THE ROOM WAS empty when Alice awoke. She stretched her arms over her head, trying to remember last night. Bits and pieces floated around in her head. Tidbits of conversations reminded her that she'd had a very exciting night indeed. First off, there was kissing Megan. Alice smiled at the thought. Next was beer and lots more kissing, people whose lips were foreign to her own, yet many that were pleasant. She'd kissed Frances on the lips for the first time, and the last. She hoped Franny finally realized that they would never be more than friends.

Then there was all that talk on the deck. Alice had heard Megan. She felt like a piece of dog dung hanging on a hind leg. Yup, that's what she felt like. No better than. She had tried to fix things with Emily. Well, fix wasn't exactly correct. More like undo. Oh, why did she have to go up to Emily's cabin and try to break it off under those conditions, with Emily in nothing but lace and Alice filled with drink. What was she thinking?

She wanted Megan, that's what she was thinking. She'd been warned by Megan herself, though she probably didn't think Alice would remember the conversation. Lot of good it did her now, Alice thought. Megan was gone.

Alice glanced around trying to find a clue of Megan's whereabouts. Aha, a note. A little scribbled thing lying on her pillow, it read:

**Didn't want to wake you, you looked so peaceful sleeping there, in a world all your own. I'm not sure what happened last night, but if you are free to have brunch with me this morning that will tell me you are serious about us. If you have broken things off with Emily, then come find me in the Second Class dining room. I'll wait for you until two. If you don't show up, I will know what you have decided.**

**Love, Megan**

Love is it now? Alice smiled.

She dressed quickly, anxious to be back in the presence of Megan. She felt safe, for the first time in a very long time, perhaps ever. Since that horrible carriage accident that took her parents, she had been on a roller coaster of places and people, and continents even, now that she thought about it. With Megan, she felt at peace.

Alice found Megan in the dining room. She sat in a corner booth with the sunshine cascading over her, catching the natural red highlights in her auburn hair. She looked like a Madonna for a moment. Alice sat down opposite her. "Thank you for letting me sleep. I must have needed it."

Megan beamed at her.

A waiter arrived and poured Alice some coffee. She took a long satisfying sip of the hot drink. "Oh my word, they know how to make a good cup of coffee." Or her body craved it after a night of drinking. "How long have you been up?"

“Not that much longer than you,” Megan said. “A little while is all. Alexandria and I woke around the same time. You just missed them. My brother came by and whisked her off to some unknown parts of the ship that only crew members get to stray to. Not fair.” Megan gave a pout, which made Alice stare at her lips.

Megan reached across the table and grabbed Alice’s hands. She gave a gentle squeeze and released them. “I just wanted to touch you.” Megan smiled into Alice’s eyes. “It’s been a long few hours. So, what happened last night? What did you tell her? What did she say? Are you all right?” Megan bounced questions about like a Ping-Pong ball.

“Megan, I shall answer all your questions as the day progresses. You have me all day, if you wish. I have no other obligations.”

“All right. That is splendid news. But at least tell me what happened?”

“I broke it off with Emily. At least I think I did. Last night is a bit blurry.” Alice held her forehead in her palm.

“Drink some more coffee now, will you, love?” Megan spoke endearingly.

“She’s angry,” Alice said. “I think she plans to make the rest of the trip a misery for me, but I don’t intend to let her. I’m just going to avoid all the people I know today except for you. I would like to get to know you better. I want to show you how special a special relationship can really be. Let’s make a day of it, all right?”

Megan sat in thought a bit and said, “Yes, that would be good. I would like to get to know you better too. Are you up for a little adventure today then, lass? Because I just might be able to get us below decks to the deep storage area. I would like to show you my mother’s bracelet. ’Tis the only thing I have of value, except for my watch, and I think it’s pretty. I should be wearing it, which is why I thought I would go fetch it. Might you like to go with me?”

“Yes, of course I would love to go down there and explore. What great fun, and you should have your mother’s bracelet on, to remind you of where you came from. I wish I had a memento to remind me of my parents.”

“They’ll be thinking what a grand life their daughter has had. From the best schools and upbringing to where she is now on the grandest ship in all the world.”

“Yes, well, there is all that, I suppose.” Alice wasn’t quite sure how she felt about that analogy. She didn’t feel she had gotten many privileges of her station. That was just it. She wasn’t sure where she stood with anything. She wasn’t an actual Cheswick daughter. They almost treated her as such, but beneath the surface she felt that she was one step higher than the servants, which wasn’t much of a step.

Megan said, “Splendid then, let’s finish up here and be off on our adventure of the lost trunk. Sounds like a Sherlock Holmes novel now, don’t it?”

Alice followed Megan toward deep storage. It was like there was a map open in Megan’s brain and she could follow the schematic to the letter. They took the elevator down to E deck and got out. They went through the corridor, took a right at the stairs, went down another long corridor, then right again at the junction. Megan led Alice further down another corridor with doors on both sides, along another little hallway, and then down a flight of stairs.

“It sounds different down here,” Alice said as her voice echoed. “It still smells like fresh paint.”

Megan sniffed. “Yes, it does. This could be the last deck they painted because it was sanctioned for deep storage,” Megan said as they walked. They came to the door marked Royal Post. “Here we are.” Megan went through the open doorway.

They were greeted by a man with a little moustache. Megan approached the counter and spoke with the clerk. Alice couldn't hear what they said but she did see a lot of hand gestures. Megan made the man laugh, and then he walked over to another part of the counter and lifted up a portion of it like a drawbridge.

"Come on in," he said pointing down toward the left. "Go on down over there now. Mind where you walk. Keep to the lines on the floor and you should be just fine. Once you get down the ladder, be on the lookout for the door leading out to deep storage across the room and there you have it. But I haven't seen nor heard of either one of you, you hear?" With that said, he turned to walk back to his station.

"Thank you," Megan said.

"Yes, thank you," Alice repeated, but he was too far away or didn't care to reply. "Are we not supposed to be down here?"

"It's strictly off-limits to passengers." Megan flashed a smile. "But I'm no ordinary passenger. I've been down here a couple of times to ask questions, and one time they let me help with the mail a bit, so I'm practically an employee. Are you ready? Come on then, let's go have at it."

They walked around piles of sacked mail, following the line like the man said, and they came to a porthole in the floor. Gathering up their skirts as well as could be done, they climbed down the ladder into an area so cavernous that their voices echoed. They paused and glanced around. Piles and piles of trunks, all neatly wrapped up with huge heavy coiled rope waited to be taken off the ship in New York. There were automobiles on platforms, boxes and bags and, of course, more trunks.

Pile after pile they saw, but it was to the trunks that Megan turned. "I thought mine was unique," she said. "I've never seen another one like it before, but that was then and this is now. See how alike they all are?"

"Not really," Alice said. "Look, there are humpbacks and wardrobe cases and flat tops. What kind is yours?"

"It's a flat top," Megan said. "It has carvings drawn into the top that I know are one-of-a-kind, but we can't see the tops of them from here. I suppose it's a fantasy that we could find my trunk. I don't need to get my mother's bracelet after all. I can see it in New York when we berth in a couple of days."

"No, we can't stop searching now, this is the most fun I've had in years. I haven't had an adventure like this in my whole life. Let's not give up now. I want you to have what you want." Alice leaned over. "This is what I want." She captured Megan's mouth with her own. She touched her tongue to Megan's lips, and when Megan opened a little further, Alice took full advantage and kissed her long and hard. Alice reeled. She felt like she was going to lose consciousness, and she moaned softly. Could this be real? Could this really be happening? Is this how it feels to fall in love?

Megan's eyes fluttered open as she licked her lips and then a little smile appeared on her face. "Oh, my."

"Let's look a little while and see if we just might find it. You never know," Alice said. "Tell me more about the trunk."

"It's brown, not black, and the leather strips on the sides have carvings on them too. Teak wood slats, so highly varnished they shine. I don't see any others like that, but it'll take some miracle to find it."

“Let’s both go from pile to pile, and side to side for a while. It’s nice and quiet down here, and we do have it all to ourselves. This is such a treat. Thank you.” Alice put her hand in Megan’s. “Walk with me?”

Up and down the rows they wandered looking to and fro, stern to bow, searching for Megan’s trunk. The whole time Alice kept finding little excuses to touch a different part of Megan’s arm or to caress her back. Just touching her was enough, Alice realized.

“There it is.” Megan hopped up and down on nervous feet, excited as a kid on Christmas. “I’d know it anywhere.” She pointed to a trunk near the narrow top of one stack, piled in a pyramid and wrapped neatly in a netting of rope.

“My Lord, but that’s a little high from the ground, wouldn’t you say?” Alice asked.

Megan walked around the pile and assessed the situation. “I think I can use the rope as a sort of ladder,” she said.

“You’ll fall,” Alice cried.

“I don’t think so,” Megan said. “The rope gives it stability and gives me a handhold. I can climb on the other trunks as easily as climbing stairs. No one is about, truly? Then keep a watch and I’ll be right back.” She tucked her skirts into her waist to free her legs, and up she scampered, using the ropes as a monkey would, climbing until she reached the trunk.

Alice was terrified to watch, but she couldn’t turn away. Megan seemed sure of her footing, though, and she was right. The trunks were as stable as a staircase.

“I’m just going to give one of these a shove out of the way,” Megan called down. “Don’t be alarmed if you see a few move.”

There was a shifting of a couple of trunks at the top, and then Megan called out, “I’ve got the trunk open. Now I just need to find it. It should be right on top. Here it is.” A few moments later she started the climb down.

“Thank you for this wonderful view I’m receiving,” Alice said, grinning up at Megan’s backside. Now that Megan seemed out of danger, Alice decided to enjoy herself.

“Goodness,” Megan said, climbing down as easily as she had climbed up. “Are you flirting with me? If anyone’s ever flirted with me before, I never knew it.”

“I’m sure I’m not the first to flirt with you,” Alice said, “especially if you dressed like that.”

Megan laughed and dropped the last few feet to the ground.

“Look at this bracelet. It was my grandmother’s before it was my mother’s. It is nice, isn’t it? I’m so glad we found it. I would hate to have dragged you down here on a wild goose chase.”

“I would have enjoyed myself even if we hadn’t found it,” Alice said, but she looked at Megan’s arm where a gold chain bracelet rested heavily on Megan’s delicate wrist. “Are you sure this wasn’t your grandfather’s? It’s pretty, but rather bulky for a woman’s wrist.”

“And heavy too. My arm will get stronger just by wearing it. See here, where I’ve rubbed a bit, you can see tiny flowers. It has to have belonged to a woman.” Megan’s laughter echoed in the cavernous room. “Come on then. I’m famished. Let’s go get us a bite to eat and then find something else to entertain us for the evening. What do you say?”

Alice grabbed at Megan’s wrist, but she missed. Megan fluttered off, whisking herself into a whirlwind dance, with her arms swaying about and her legs kicking free. Finally she came to a stop. “It just feels so freeing down here. I can do anything I want and there is no one to judge me. Don’t you feel it too?” Megan asked earnestly.

“I fear I have been judged my whole life, so I don’t know any different. Freeing, you say?”

“Yes, in so many ways. Can I ask something of you?” Megan had a questioning expression on her face. Not really waiting for an answer, Megan said, “I have a small request for you. Will you kiss me again?”

“I don’t think it should always be me kissing you. I think that if you want to be kissed, then you should start making it a habit to come and get it. That’s the way with me. I go get what I want. Well, mostly.”

With that said Megan boldly walked up to Alice, put her arms around her neck and leaned in for a kiss. Not a little kiss either. An open mouthed kiss. A this-is-what-I-want kind of kiss. For a beginner, she was a quick learner. She was very thorough. When she had finished, she calmly stepped back and said, “Shall we go back and dine then?”

It was Alice, this time, who raised her hand to her lips, a feeling of astonishment sweeping over her. She blinked a couple of times and said, “How did you do that? I’ve never felt that before in all the kisses I have received in my lifetime. It was like time stopped for just a moment and then there you were. So, I ask, how did you do that?”

“Maybe it is best left up to the gods,” Megan said, “or the alignment of the stars or to fate for that matter. But as long as we are aware of the fact that our friendship truly is something special, then we shall never go astray from each other.”

COFFEE IN THE evening was a rare treat for Alice. She watched Megan squirm about in her seat, looking this way and that, and said, “Megan, what do you think of this Second Class dining room? The décor is as nice as or nicer than most other ships I believe. This would have probably been First Class on any other boat.”

“Ship,” Megan said.

“Boat, ship, what do I know? All I know is that I am having coffee with a very dear friend.” Alice stirred the spoon around and around in her porcelain cup, making it ping the sides.

“I like this place very much actually. I feel more comfortable down here than up there.” Megan thrust her nose up towards the ceiling. “And the best part is you don’t have to dress for dinner. I’m certainly not going to miss having to wear those gloves again. I just cannot fathom why they have to be so long, all the way past the elbow. Why, I had never heard of such a thing. Do you know?”

“Well, I am sad to say that in my circles it is considered poor upbringing to be seen without gloves. I prefer to wear gloves at dances, actually, because the gentlemen’s hands are often sweaty. Men’s sweaty hands turn my stomach. Perhaps that is why I prefer women.”

“Women?” Megan asked.

“No, no, I meant woman. As in one. You.”

They stared into each other’s eyes for a long moment.

“I love your accent, by the way,” Alice said quietly. “The way you say my name, it’s different than I have ever heard before. I love the way it has a ‘y’ sound to it now. Like Alyce or something like that. It’s very endearing to hear it off your lips.” Alice giggled in nervousness.

Megan smiled back. “Well, in that case Alice, Alice, Alice, I could go on for days. The way you make me feel—I never thought possible. I’m so alive in your eyes. It’s lovely to see. I could sit here all evening and stare into those beautiful blue eyes.”

“Now you’re just making me blush.”

“It is but my pleasure, of course,” Megan replied in a French accent.

“How did you do that?”

“Do what?”

“You know, sound like Alexandria. The French accent?”

“Oh, that. I pick up different dialects and can imitate them within a couple of hours. It’s not hard, really. I do bird sounds too.” She puckered up her lips and gave a twittering whistle.

Alice laughed. “My, my, you are a woman of many talents. Shall we go see what other talents you can pick up? In plain language, may we go back to our cabin?”

Megan’s eyes lit up like a candle on Christmas, full of wonder and joy.

“Yes, I am more than ready. I hope Alexandria is not there.”

They returned to their room.

“Hello, Alexandria, are you here?” Megan asked a little too loudly. There was no answer and they grinned at each other.

As Megan unlocked the door, Alice rested her hand on Megan’s lower back. She let her hand roam even lower and caressed Megan’s curves. As soon as they entered, she turned and pressed Megan back against the door. Lips on lips, kissing Megan was so easy, and she seemed to enjoy it. Alice moved her hands over Megan’s body passionately, but lovingly, aware that Megan had never felt such touches before. It felt wonderful to be able to touch Megan, like in a dream. Megan was hers to touch, hers to mold.

“Oof!” Megan said. The door behind her had started to open, hitting Megan in the head.

Alice broke off and stepped back. Megan put a hand on her head and opened the door.

Alexandria stood there looking a little perplexed. “What has happened? Why was the door so heavy to open?”

“Um, I was leaning on it,” Megan said. “Yes, that’s right, I was leaning on it talking to Alice when you tried to open it and smacked me in the head.”

“Oh, I am sorry for my timing. Perhaps you are going out this evening?” Alexandria asked.

“No,” Megan said. “We are both tired and want to go to bed early. But you can go out. It wouldn’t bother us at all if you came in late, just don’t come in all noisy, like Alice did the other night.”

The two women laughed at Alice’s expense. Alice had to stand there being the brunt of the joke, begging silently for Alexandria to pick up on Megan’s hint and leave.

“No, I think I shall join you in retiring early,” Alexandria said. “I am, how you say, tuckered out?”

The three women got undressed and climbed into their beds. Alice tried to avoid staring at Megan as she undressed, for her feelings were so strong she would not be able to hide them from Alexandria. She clenched her fists in frustration. Megan lay so near, and still Alice could not touch her. She watched out of the corner of her eye.

Alice was fascinated with Megan’s breasts, how they moved with the cloth and how she arched her back ever so slightly in a stretch that looked so good. She wanted to cross the room and hold herself naked against Megan’s breasts.

Perhaps tomorrow. Tomorrow will be soon enough. Yes, they still had several days aboard *Titanic*. There would be another chance to teach Megan all the ways her body could feel the magic of love.

# Chapter Eighteen

## 14 April 1912 — Morning

EMILY KNOCKED SOFTLY on the Cheswicks' suite door. "I'll get it," she heard Frances faintly say, as she opened the door. "Oh, hi, Emily. How are you this fine morning? We are about to go to church. Is that why you're here? To join us? Where is Ethan?"

"My Lord, you're starting to sound like Megan. So full of questions. Is Alice about?" Emily asked serenely.

"No, I suppose we will see her at the service. She had a bit the other night. I haven't seen hide nor hair of either one of them since night before last. That other night, with you." Frances wiggled her eyebrows at Emily. "You know, kissing. Was there someone special who stood out in your little experiment? I thought it was fun." Frances smiled up at Emily.

"Yes, indeed, it was at that. I did enjoy our moment, immensely." Emily smiled back at her. "It's too bad you're not a little older, hmm?"

"What does age have to do with it?" Frances replied. "If it's a match, then who am I to say no? I'm attracted to whom I'm attracted to." She was still smiling as she turned to watch her mother enter the sitting area.

"Good morning, Mrs. Cheswick. How does this fine day catch you? I've come to join you all for the service. Ethan possibly will join us, but you do know how men are, don't you?" Emily chuckled conspiratorially to Helene.

"Are we ready to go?" Emily took Frances's arm, tucked it into her own and led the way.

As they went out the door, Helene turned. "We're leaving now Fletcher. I'm going with the girls. See you there. I'll save you a seat if I can."

Emily turned to Frances after they were seated at the service. "So, you never did say where Alice was, did you? Why isn't she with you all?"

"Oh, she doesn't room with us. There's no bed for her there. We were so late in gaining passage, we got the best *Titanic* had to offer, so Papa set her up down in Second Class. He said it saved him two hundred pounds. He thought he was so smart until Mama found out and gave him a talking to, and it wasn't pretty. Alice is like family to us, nearly, but...she's not a Cheswick. Her last name is Pearce. She's my mother's godchild from St. Louis. I thought you knew all of this? You're giving me a perplexed look."

Emily asked, "What, she's not your sister? She's not a Cheswick? You were always together at parties, gatherings, breakfasts? I just assumed that she and you and they—but now suddenly, she's not. Hmm."

"She has been here most of my lifetime. She was brought over when she was twelve by some missionaries from St. Louis saying she had no relatives that could care for her at that time. Mother was listed as godmother in Alice's mother's papers. She has always been a part of my family, but, well, not quite. You know? She wasn't born into a name of some greatness, like you and I were. That is so funny that you thought we were sisters. Her, a Cheswick. No, her family

were farmers from Missouri, not shipping magnates or bankers. She has no money of her own, unfortunately. Only us,” Frances said sadly.

“No matter, we shall see her after services.” Emily’s stomach clenched in rage. Not a Cheswick? No money? Second Class? She made sure that her face showed nothing unusual. “This place is filling up rapidly. Even if we find them we cannot save them a seat. First Class, Second Class, even Third Class have all been invited to this service.” Emily tried to turn back the churning in her stomach, which burned at the thought of being lied to by Alice. Not telling her up front about her situation was a lie. Come to think of it, Alice never had invited Emily to her room. Emily thought it was because her living quarters were shared with the family. What family?

Still burning inside, she smiled over at Frances and asked sweetly, “How old are you again, or did you say?”

DIVINE SERVICES STARTED at ten-thirty, open to all passengers. All classes are welcome, the sign said. The Third Class passengers that were seated already had a look of awe in their faces as they glanced around at everything as if they’d never before seen such grandeur. They were worshipping with Royalty. A quiet tremor filled the air. All had much to be thankful for. The steerage people knew that they were given a great gift from *Titanic*. There was equality amongst the classes, if only for a while. Singing with all classes combined their voices, lifting high in song together. It sounded wonderful.

Megan sat to the left of Alice and Alexandria. As she leaned back to talk to Alexandria about the service, she watched Alice trying to get Frances’s attention six rows ahead. Very discreetly Alice waved, coughed, and did just about anything to gain her attention. Instead, she caught the eye of Emily. Oh my, if daggers could come through Emily’s eyes, Alice would be chopped up and left with nothing. Did Alice see it? Yes, she did. Her hand went down, and she brushed her hair back as she tried to gain a little composure.

Attention turned to the Captain as he welcomed all classes to the wonderful Divine Service. He asked them to please join him in hymnal number forty-nine. Megan began to sing with the congregation.

As soon as the service ended, Alexandria turned and said, “I must really insist on going. It has been very delightful but I must meet with my Papa. This is how we have become, how do you say, acquainted?”

Laughingly, Megan replied, “Have a great time and say hello to that brother of mine.”

Alexandria looked surprised and blushed. Colin’s shift started in two hours. Alexandria smiled, leaned forward to kiss Megan on the cheek, and ran off laughing.

Megan turned to smile at Alice. “Well, I think we have the day to ourselves.”

“Actually, we’re supposed to meet up with Emily and Franny at the photographer’s studio at two today to select some prints. The only one I want is the one with you and Franny in it,” Alice replied curtly. “I don’t even want to go. I’ve had enough of Emily for the rest of this voyage. Let’s not talk about her. All right?”

“No, you don’t get out of the conversation that easily.” Megan was learning to read Alice a little better. “But I will go and give your regards to the rest. I’ll tell them you have an upset stomach or something. We can arrange someplace to meet later on, or I’ll meet you back at our cabin. How does that sound?”



“All right, thank you. I’m a bit tired, so I do think I will go lie down for a wee nap, as you would say. Come walk me down, please. I’d like to kiss you but I don’t dare here out in the open. I just thought you should know.” Alice turned on her heels and started walking to the stairs to go down to their room on D deck. Megan followed closely, as close as she could walking.

ALICE WOKE UP from her nap more refreshed than she thought she would be. Nice thing about naps. Sometimes the shortest ones were the most refreshing. She decided to go on up top and see if she could find Franny. Just as she left the safety of the elevator, who did she run into, but Emily? By the look on Emily’s face she wasn’t happy to see Alice either.

Emily came right up to Alice. “You have betrayed me. How could you? After all the times and all those things we did and all, oh, just everything, you have lied to me and stolen from me. How could I have been such a fool?”

“What are you talking about?” Alice backed up to touch the railing. “I have not lied to you. I haven’t stolen.”

Fire came out of Emily’s eyes. “You have betrayed me by your failure to disclose your past with me. Not only are you not a Cheswick, as I thought, but you have no fortune or birth. It has been fun, I must say, but this betrayal of your worth and class is too much. You left with my diamond hairpin that night. I never actually gave it to you. Now I expect the return of it before New York, and I warn you, if you persist in trying to find or contact me after we have landed on solid ground, I will have those pictures of you to show your face around. I will make your life miserable, no matter which continent you are on, if you do persist. I must insist that we be parted for the rest of the voyage as well. Please, stay down in your Second Class dining hall to eat and drink and play your silly parlor games there. Do I make myself clear?” Emily’s eyes turned their true color. Green.

“Yes, ma’am, you shall never see me again.” Alice turned and headed back to the elevators. Shaken as she was, she managed to gulp out, “D deck, please.” She got off on her floor and started walking to her cabin. No, that wasn’t where she wanted to go. She needed a drink.

THE SECOND CLASS dining saloon was where Megan found her, drinking her second Manhattan of the hour.

“Well now, I’ve been all over this ship with no trace of you,” Megan said, “and here you are getting sloshed. Are you all right? Get up on the wrong side of the bed, did we now?” Megan had her hands on her hips and a smile on her face. “Let me join you. What is that? It’s pretty.”

“It’s called a Manhattan and they are pretty good too. We will get you one, and then I will tell you my troubles.”

“Troubles?”

“Yes, you see I have been accused of, oh, wait for your drink. I see a waiter.” She waved him over and ordered another round for them.

“So, tell me these troubles, since I just left you a little over an hour ago.” Megan began prodding. “What has happened? I can tell by your face that something did.”

Alice’s words poured out like water. “Am I such a rotten person to just be a classification? Don’t I deserve to be treated as a person, not just a member of a class? I was not born to

greatness or to money. I was lucky enough to have somewhere to go when my parents died. I do have wonderful memories growing up with the Cheswicks and all. But now I'm not quite sure. I'm old enough that I should have found a husband to take on the burden of my existence, but you see I did not follow that path. I took a more troubled path with lots of pitfalls. Anyway, I should have realized what a burden I had become to this family. I think I shall ask Fletcher for a job in America. I'll stay on and build a new life." Alice took another sip from her drink.

"How many of those have you had sitting here waiting for me to find you? I saw the photographs. They are wonderful. I especially like the one of you, me, and Frances. They were delightful. The way the light catches your eyes is incredible. But I don't fancy you would like to hear the scandal of the day concerning Emily, now would you? She stormed out as soon as she saw me standing next to Franny and looking at the group picture of the four of us seated with our feet pointed out and flowers in our hands. Remember that one? Well, it turns out, not only did the photographer get his little thrills, we all fell for the 'press your arms together and smile' bit. What that did was thrust our bosoms into the air, big, fleshy, plump and inviting. All with a sweet smile on our lips."

"Why, that is disgusting. We need to get those photos back. I cannot be having my reputation ruined by some photographs. What if they get out and into the wrong hands?" Alice was agitated all of a sudden.

"Wait. Let's look at this calmly. Let's back up and you tell me why you started drinking in the first place. The last time I saw you, you gave me a sweet kiss goodbye and went to take a nap. What has happened to cause all this?" Megan made a sweeping motion around Alice.

Alice drew a long, deep breath. She stretched out her arms, exhaled, and then lifted them towards the ceiling.

"I thought I had broken it off with Emily the other night. I told her I couldn't do it anymore. My meaning was that I was done. Finished. Through. But I guess in my drunken state I failed to get that message across. She found me as I was headed to find Franny. She backed me into a corner and started throwing accusations at me about lying and my classification and morals and character and I don't know what all. I guess also my worth? How does it come down to how much money you have, or can get, to buy your way to heaven? Better places, better food, better beds. Your worth is not about making money, is it? It is about the value of people. So, how much am I worth?"

"Right now, you are worth the world to me. Can I tell you that, or will it throw you into one of those tantrums, whirly windy things?" Megan teased her.

"No, it is nice to hear, and believe. That is more important. Come, let's go to the library and find a place that's quiet. Also, somewhere that Emily would not be caught dead in. She has told me to avoid her for the rest of the voyage. So, I will comply. The library it is. How very boring." Alice stuck her nose in the air and started walking, looking down on everyone around her. Which was no one, of course.

"Yes, pity." Megan also thrust her nose in the air, and linked her arm through Alice's as they started walking.

"It is but the two of us for the evening then, I suspect," Alice said. "Can you think of anything else that might take up some time before we hit New York?"

"We will think of something. I am sure of it." On toward the library they wandered. Once seated in some chairs by a table, Alice brought up another subject.

Alice said, "This might be a good time to tell you I have been thinking again about that special relationship you had talked of early on. Trust, liking someone first, then kissing and all

that goes with that, and then on to planning a life together. You can both live with someone and then marry them, or you can live in doubt and wait for the other shoe to drop. The questions go on and on. I like you. I trust you. That seems awfully quick, but when it is right you just know it. We have only known each other for such a short time, and yet I feel I have known you a lifetime. You understand me, even when I don't understand myself. But let me get back to that special relationship talk. Yes, I would love to have one with you. Second, I did have that type of relationship with Emily, which I thought was building quite nicely, but only on her terms, so not really, I guess. But that is over. So over that I will probably never see her again. And that seems soon enough for me. That, that woman, oh, don't let me get started again. Let's concentrate on us, all right?"

"Let's disappear," Megan said. She glanced at her watch. "It's now four thirty. Let's vanish from sight and simply enjoy each other. On Monday afternoon, we shall reappear and start mingling amongst those who might have missed us and see where we are by then. Once we dock in New York, we'll know what is right and best. Do you agree? Let's go find my brother and Alexandria. All signs are showing that she might be my sister-in-law soon. Let's go ask her if she could spare us the room for the next twenty-four hours. We'll tell her it's the plague or something."

"No, not a plague, darling, how about the stomach flu? If we find them, try to look sick. I shall be your nurse. I'll use Franny as a reference."

"Look, how convenient. There's Jacob now. Jacob, Jacob do you know where your daughter is?"

JACOB LED THEM to a corridor just off the last stack toward the stern. He stopped, looked both ways, and said, "Follow me, but quietly please."

He entered another, tighter, passageway and started to climb the ladder that was bolted onto the wall. Halfway up the ladder he pinged on the side of the stack, twice, with a dime he had taken from his pocket. He pushed on a couple of rivets and a little door appeared, jackknifing out of the stack. He climbed over the berm and gestured for them to follow. Both women gathered up their dresses to begin the short climb up and then through. What greeted them was a bit of a surprise. They were in a little round room where Colin and Alexandria sat at a small table playing what appeared to be a card game. Both were a little flushed in the cheek area. The rest of the room was sparsely furnished with a small bed, a dressing table, and a mirror.

"I never intended for this little hideaway to be holding so many people," Jacob said. "It is a bit squeezed in here. I shall take my leave, but bye-the-bye have you a care to be extra careful leaving now. This is all a secret. Please remember."

His head disappeared from view and down the ladder he went.

Moving the rivets again somehow closed the door. Two taps of the dime sounded different inside than it did outside.

It was a very small room, but Megan pulled Colin aside. Megan wanted to laugh at him and the situation they had not quite caught them in, but in reality, she wanted to ask for the same thing. Peace and quiet with the girl he adored. Well, she adored. In a quiet voice Megan started by asking if Alexandria could stay somewhere else that night. His answer was louder than she wanted.

"Ask her, for God's sake. Not me. I'm not your roommate."

“No, you are my brother, who I love and who I think would appreciate the opportunity I am giving him. But, no, I get a man’s wounded pride.”

“What is it?” Colin smiled a question. “You seem to be full of yourself now.”

“All right, here goes. I need to have Alexandria stay elsewhere tonight until at least the mid-morning of tomorrow. I cannot really explain the purpose, but I will tell you when we hit port in New York. All right then?” Megan asked earnestly.

“Well, I still think that you should ask Alex herself,” Colin said looking smug.

“Oh, Alex is it now, boyo?” Megan turned her attention to Alexandria. “Alexandria, would you mind if I asked you a question?” The girl turned and faced Megan. “Would you mind spending the night here or in some other accommodations just for tonight? We need to conduct a, a, yes, that’s it, an experiment.”

“An experiment?”

“Yes, my experiment of a new way of life,” Megan said with conviction.

“It’s not dangerous now, is it?” Colin sounded concerned.

“No, not really, just to my heart,” Megan whispered.

Colin glanced over to where Alice stood. “So that is the way the wind blows eh, Megs, me love?”

“Anything is possible,” Megan said, “even love.”

“Anything for love I will do for you. I too have noticed sparks flying about the room when you both think I was not paying attention, but I was,” Alexandra said.

Megan walked over to Alexandria and gave her a hug. “Take good care of him. We’ll see you both, tomorrow night then, for dinner in the Second Class dining room please.”

“Thank you.” Alex leaned into Colin. He grabbed her by the waist and held on. With a huge smile on his face he waved goodbye with his other hand, his fingers waggling.

Alice went first down the ladder followed by Megan.

“Thanks,” Megan said to her brother as she disappeared into the darkness. “Have fun.” They heard a slight ping, ping a moment later.

“What did you think of that little room we were just in?” Megan asked Alice as they strolled towards their cabin.

“Well, it was very small, but it would have had a great view of the stars. The stack straight up seemed looming. Do you suppose Jacob made it? He is a master welder and all. It was very well hidden.”

“If you didn’t know it was there you would climb right past it on the way up to the surveillance station that we can see from the top deck of the ship,” Megan said.

“You remember that scare that went round the ship that first day?” Alice asked. “Surely you heard of a black face appearing in that window staring down upon us all. Some thought it was the devil himself putting a curse on *Titanic*. The rumors died down after it was discovered that a fireman had climbed the ladder to the station to watch the festivities of the launch. He was an Irishman who had just finished working in the coal room and had black soot all over his face. His blue eyes appeared and his white teeth showed when he smiled. Jacob has blue eyes and now we have a suspicion of who it really was. Wait until I tell Frances.”

“You love telling gossip, don’t you, love?” Megan asked.

“You call it gossip, I call it re-telling stories. Are you ready to go back to our cabin?”

ALICE HUNG THE Do Not Disturb sign on the door and closed it tight. She locked the door, making her feel safe from the eyes of the many on board. She turned to find Megan already unbuttoning her dress.

“Here, let me help you with that,” Alice said.

“I don’t really need help with anything, but if you want to,” Megan said.

“I want to,” Alice said. She unbuttoned the last four buttons, pulled the dress down from Megan’s shoulders, and kissed the top of her breast. “I want to do everything with you, all in good time, love, as you would say.” Alice kissed Megan full on the lips, taking her mouth with her tongue. She heard a moan, but she didn’t know if it came from her or from Megan. Alice helped Megan undress more until all that was left was a one-piece chemise made of filmy linen. Alice pulled back the sheets and blanket on her bed and invited Megan to climb in. Megan did and scooted over, then patted the side next to her.

“You next,” Megan said. “I want to watch.”

It was Alice’s turn to flush. And here she thought she had the upper hand. Slowly, she removed her dress, watching Megan watch her the whole time. The rise and fall of Megan’s breasts as she breathed deep, trying to keep her composure, gave her away. She was as excited about their lovemaking as Alice was.

Alice removed her corset and stockings, but kept her chemise on as well. She eased herself onto the bed. She gathered Megan close, and they touched breast to breast, both breathing heavily and hugging fiercely. Alice’s hands touched Megan’s back, her sides, her butt, moving quickly from one place to the next. Whatever Alice did, it was reciprocated by Megan. Alice felt Megan’s hands all over her. She knew what she wanted, and she knew that Megan must want the same.

Alice stopped kissing Megan, drew back, and asked, “If there is anything I’m doing that you don’t like, tell me. It won’t hurt my feelings. Or if there is something you’d like, I know how I feel but I’m not sure about you. So—”

Her sentence was cut off by Megan’s lips on hers. She kissed Alice deeply and her hands boldly touched. She removed Alice’s chemise and then touched Alice’s naked breast. She gathered it in her palm, kneading the taut tip as it grew in her fingers. She finished the kiss but still was intent on making Alice’s nipple rise in her hand. Alice looked at Megan’s hand on her breast. It sent juices flowing from her crotch as she opened her legs on Megan’s thigh. Slowly she arched up and felt her clit brush the hard surface. She had the need for Megan to know how much she wanted her. She felt Megan’s juices on her thigh. They rocked back and forth on each other as Alice nipped and licked Megan’s ear, eliciting a moan from her lover.

Alice removed Megan’s chemise and rolled Megan onto her back, fully capturing her body under her own. She molded herself into Megan’s arms and legs as if they were one. Not yet, though. Her hands were molding Megan’s breasts simultaneously as the tips grew to small pebbles. She replaced her fingers with her mouth. Megan moaned and pushed her body into Alice, pleading for more. Her tongue circled the tip of Megan’s breast, which grew in Alice’s mouth as she gently moved her hand down Megan’s body. She stopped at the hair of Megan’s mound. Her little finger reached out to stroke it and she waited for a reaction. Megan’s hips jerked forward, searching for a fulfillment as ancient as the stars. Alice’s hand crawled down the hairline of Megan’s crotch until she reached her apex and flailed her fingers, rejoicing in the juices that flowed for her. Megan was so wet with wanting it made Alice feel special.

This was what Alice had been searching for, forever, since she knew she liked the ladies. A special relationship, like this could be. She delved her finger into Megan and heard her gasp.

Yes, this is what she wanted. Megan bore down on her hand and Alice withdrew a little and went back in with her thigh helping the old rhythm of love.

Alice kissed Megan sweetly as her fingers closed in on Megan's button, teasing it until Megan was panting and writhing in her desire for release. Alice could feel the tension building in Megan as she urged her toward the light of release. Megan's body went taut as her sounds became moans and deep breathing with an "Oh my" thrown in as she reached her climax. Megan's body bucked, riding the wave of sensation filling her body until she collapsed and Alice gathered her into her arms and held her tight. Alice rocked her and kissed her neck and they held onto each other, both breathing heavily.

"Wow, I never expected that," Megan gasped. "Whatever that was, I would like it again please, or rather, should we take turns? Will you teach me what you like to have done to you?" Megan asked shyly as she squeezed Alice.

"Oh, Megan, there is so much more I'd like us to explore. I don't want to be blamed for creating a Jezebel, unless, of course, you're my Jezebel," Alice said tenderly as she wiggled her eyebrow. "We have all night." She kissed Megan and opened her legs onto Megan's thigh once again. Writhing back and forth she said, "Here. Put your hand and fingers here and wiggle your fingers when you feel a little ball forming. You'll know what to do, really." As she let herself flow with the stimulation Megan was giving her, she felt the momentum building.

"Go inside, please," Alice squeaked out. "Don't stop what you're doing. That's it. Don't stop. Please, oh, my, Megan. Megan!" Alice shouted her name for all to hear.

Her breathing subsided a few moments later. Her heart slowed and beat in rhythm with Megan's, and she never wanted to let her go. This euphoria was different from anything Alice had felt before. Nothing she had experienced with Emily or any of the other women she'd been with felt quite like this. Megan fit Alice, and even better, Alice knew that Megan's feelings mirrored her own.

Alice leaned back to look Megan in her eyes and said, "See. I knew you wouldn't need much direction. Thank you for that. I could lie here with you for the rest of my life."

"That sounds wonderful," Megan said. "Except for one thing. I'm famished."

Alice laughed. "Me too. Lovemaking makes me hungry." She hugged Megan and rolled out of the bed.

She walked naked to the wardrobe and got out another dress to put on. Alice saw Megan watching her. She took the hairpin that Emily had given her. She held it out for Megan to see. "Should I wear this one last time, before I give it back? It's a lovely piece, even if it does belong to someone not so honorable." Alice looked over at Megan and saw the wanting look lingering in her eyes, staring at her nude body. "We'll have more time for that, a little later. All night, in fact. For there are many things I'd like to teach you." She wiggled her eyebrow and then her stomach growled. "I'm afraid though, I need sustenance first."

ALICE AND MEGAN had a late supper in the Second Class dining room. The two women couldn't keep their eyes from one another. Alice gazed into Megan's eyes and dropped her second coconut sandwich onto her plate. "Oh, Megan. You've caught me in such a whirlwind that I forgot, until now, the photographs. I have to go to the studio and retrieve them. I want to destroy evidence of all the photos of me with another woman. I am the one whose indiscretions have caught up with her, and I am the one who needs to fix it. But you may help me."

Megan laughed and said, "Thank you for allowing me to help you. I may come in a little handier than you already know. Come on then. Let's go and find those photos. On to save yon maiden's neck."

"I'm not going to forget about the negatives either," Alice said with a great deal of conviction.

Megan led the way and soon they arrived at the photographer's studio only to find a note tacked on the door. "Moved to Squash Court Number One, Located on G deck."

"Just in case you were wondering, yes, I do know where that is," Megan proudly said.

"Of course you do. I never had a doubt. Lead the way, fair lady."

"Do you mind going outside for a walk before we go back in? I am in need of some fresh air," Megan asked as she led them to the doorway leading outside.

"No, not at all. Please, lead the way," Alice replied softly.

Out on the short open air deck, gazing up at the stars, Megan shivered slightly. "'Tis a cold one tonight. We'd best bundle ourselves up tomorrow. It's a clear night too. Just look at the stars." They stood gazing up at the sky, hardly noticing some crew members passing by also talking about clear nights and how the icebergs about would be tough to see, with no growlers and such.

"Are you ready to go down into the bowels of *Titanic* again?" Megan asked evilly.

"Whatever do you mean by that?"

"I mean that the squash court is in the bottom of the ship just across from the post office. I stopped by there earlier on in the trip. That's when I met up with all the fellows. I talked to them about trying to get work in the Americas and all with them, seeing as I have experience with ticket dealings and such."

"I see. I'm sorry, but I didn't even think that you might have plans after the voyage. How naïve of me. Of course, that is a splendid idea. Perhaps I, too, can obtain employment. Let's stop by in the morning and gain more knowledge about the how and wherefores and so-forths. It is good to keep the lines of communication open at all times. Fletcher at least taught me that much in my time watching him deal with the estate."

Soon they stood in front of Squash Court Number One. It had a closed sign on it, the hours saying, "Nine to Nine."

Alice heaved a huge sigh. "I didn't even think about it being closed." She was alone in hoping for a miracle, but she tried the door handle anyway. "Oh, darn, it's locked too." Turning to Megan, she said, "Well, I didn't think about this being locked, did you?"

"Yes I did. There is a lot of equipment inside and it should be locked. But I've come prepared." Pride sounded in Megan's voice. She took a long straight pin from her hair, and slipped it into the little hole in the lock. "My brothers used to lock me out of their rooms every day. But what they didn't know was that I figured out how to pick the locks on their doors, after lots and lots of practice. I saw this guy once, Houdini, I think was his name. Anyway, he picked all these locks he had chained himself up in with a small hat pin he had concealed in his hair. So that got me to thinking I could do the same thing with my brothers. You see, the trick is in the feel. When you feel a slight bump against metal, then a slot in which you insert the head of the pin, then you turn your wrist ever so slightly. You hear a pop and the door opens. Voilà."

"I didn't know you knew French. Is that how you talk with Alexandria?" Alice asked smiling at Megan's antics.

"No, is that French? I heard Houdini say it, so I said it. So let's see if I can do some magic here on this door. Watch out for people coming." Megan crouched down to the lock. She inserted

the pin into the hole. She turned her wrist just so and voilà. It clicked. She reached out with her other hand to grasp the handle, and the door swung open. They slipped quickly inside and closed and relocked the door. "Just in case," Megan said.

"My Lord, my heart is beating so fast. Yes, I agree. Now would not be the time to get caught." Alice scanned the room, found a wall sconce, and turned it on. It was a tall, square, empty room with straight lines painted on the floor and high walls, one dotted with little black marks all over it. Three high windows showed lights from the upper decks. She saw a door on the far side of the court. She walked toward it, past the racquets hanging on the wall reminding her they were in a court of some physical activity. She had no idea what squash was.

"Oh, damn it, this one is locked too," Alice said with a pout.

"Here, perhaps this will help." Megan tossed her a key. "I found it here in this cabinet. It will probably open that."

Alice inserted the key into the lock. Indeed, it did fit. Inside was a windowless office. She walked over to a table with a small lamp on it and turned it on. It cast a shadow and light filtered through strips of film, which hung in rows from wall to wall on string. Upon closer investigation, Alice gasped when she realized that all those strips were filled with photographs. Little tiny images on strange, see-through film. So that is what a negative looked like. "Fascinating. Megan, I've found them. In here."

Megan entered and walked past a desk and a wall of chemicals in glass jars, each labeled for contents. On the other wall was a nice setup for taking photographs, a red settee and a beautiful throw rug.

"Wow, so many." The strips of film dangled and curled but did not touch one another.

"I think we should go about this systematically," Alice said. "One row at a time, starting at the back working forward. I'll stay up and work front to back."

"What you are really saying is that you would like for me to start in the back and work my way forward. You certainly have a strange way of asking someone to do something for you," Megan said bluntly.

"I'm sorry. You are neither my maid nor my house staff. I do not know how to tell you to do something." Alice held her hands up in despair. "I will try to just ask for help, all right?"

"Yes, love, I can do that." Megan leaned over to kiss her. "Yell out if you find them before I do. I will also." As she scurried around the back, Megan cried out, "It's bloody dark back here. Care to fetch me a torch? I saw one on the desk."

Alice found the torch and took it back to Megan.

Alice said, "I know we'll find them. Thank you for helping me with my bizarre idea of wanting to be in charge of these pictures. I'd rather be the keeper than the other." Alice kissed Megan and turned to go to the front. "Good luck to us." She gestured with crossed fingers and arms. She turned back to begin the task of finding those pictures. She just had to.

Picture after picture Alice searched. Many people like them were posed in various positions, standing, sitting, lying across the lounge, looking very scrumptious. Oh, wait, she was not supposed to be enjoying herself. Keep searching. Alice started a little mantra in her head. Search, search, look, look, no, no, no, where are they?

"Any luck back there?" Alice spoke aloud.

"No, not yet. You?"

"No, not yet for me either. Well, come on then, let's keep searching. I've got to find them and destroy them, or at least steal them," Alice said in desperation.



Picture after picture they searched. Strip after strip of all these people, a lot of crew members and captain shots amongst them. Sunrises or maybe sunsets. They were beautiful, but it was hard to tell the difference in a tiny strip of film.

Oh, it had been a glorious voyage. These last few days with Megan would be even better. Alice was thoughtful as she searched the strips for those of the four of them, Megan, Alice, Frances, and Emily. Only the pairings have changed, she smirked to herself.

The whole voyage had been quite the adventure. First, Alice was stuck down in Second Class, not that there was anything wrong with her accommodations, especially now with the circumstances and all. It was just a whirlwind. It would slow down now that she had been banished from the First Class areas by Emily. Oh where were those pictures? She had to find them. She also wished to climb back into bed with Megan. She could still be with her for another few hours until Alexandria came back. Wait, what's this?

"Here they are. I've found them. Come see," Alice yelled out. Alice unclipped the strips from their lofty positions. She was beside herself with joy.

Suddenly she was tackled from behind and landed on the settee with a bounce. "Ah ha, I've got you right where I want you," Megan said in a dastardly voice. "Let me have my way with you, my pretty one." Megan rolled Alice until she was lying beneath her. Alice felt Megan boldly place her hand inside the bodice of Alice's dress. Megan's hand grasped her left breast and Alice felt herself grow hard in Megan's fingers. Megan gasped. Alice went to kiss Megan when a huge jolt suddenly landed both of them onto the floor.

"What was that?" Alice exclaimed as they were righting themselves.

"Probably something shifted in the cargo hold. We are far in the depths of the ship. Nothing to worry about. It probably happens all the time. We should get up and keep gathering all these photographs, for safekeeping and all. You aren't hurt anywhere, are you?"

"No, I'm fine. Here are the ones I've been searching for. Will you hand me those scissors there?" Moments later the only sound that could be heard was that of the shears cutting the film into little pieces. The photos were all undistinguishable as far as Alice was concerned, except for one. This one she would keep close to her heart. She tucked the negative of herself, Megan and Franny into her bodice.

"I've found the printed set of photographs," Megan said from the desk.

Alice joined her and looked at the sample photos the photographer had printed. All sorts of pictures were there. Photos of the crew, working men in the boiler room, the ship's musicians, "minus Colin," Megan said.

There they were. Alice could hardly believe they looked like that. She glanced at Megan, smiled, kissed her, and stared again at the pictures. Serene and beautiful images of women gazed back at her. One made her gasp. It was the one where the photographer had tricked them into plumping up their breasts. Alice said, "Goodness, even Frances's breasts look large there."

Megan laughed.

The next photo showed Emily and Alice gazing into each other's eyes.

"Give me that one," Alice said. She snipped it with the scissors until it was in pieces.

"I'll not let you have this one," Megan said, holding the photograph of Megan, Alice and Frances.

"No, I like that one," Alice said. "We can keep it. I think that's all. I am ready to leave. Let's go back to our room so I can show you how much I have missed you."

Megan smiled, "But you have been with me this whole time."

“Yes, this is true. But not where I want you now.” Alice reached out to pull Megan close. Her arms went around her waist when a loud knock was heard from the door. A voice followed.

“Help, is there anyone in there? I see light coming from the windows above. We need help. Hello, any one, any one at all?” The man sounded desperate.

They turned out the office light, closed the door, and crossed back over the squash court. Megan tucked the photograph into the sleeve of her dress, opened the door, and peered out.

“Smitty, is that you?”

“Yes, yes it is. Do I know you? Well, it doesn’t matter. We need your help. You too, miss. The water is rushing in fast. We need to save as many mail bags as possible. We need to get them up out of the hold before the water beats us to them. Come on then. Hurry up and follow me. Time is of the essence.”

“Water? From where?” Megan asked.

“We’ve struck an iceberg. It sliced right through the hull. She’s filling up fast. The watertight doors are sealing. We haven’t much time, miss.”

“Water, from the ocean? Inside the ship? It must be freezing cold water if that be. Come on, we’ve got to help,” Megan said over her shoulder to Alice. They followed Smitty down the hallway to the Sea Post Officers entrance. Once inside, it seemed all hell had broken loose. Water was coming up through the hatches from the storerooms below. The stored items they weren’t supposed to need until they reached New York were covered with water. Megan’s trunk was down there somewhere.

“Good Smitty, you found someone to help,” said Bill, the head registry clerk. “You there?” He pointed at Megan. “Come over here and start stuffing these sacks full of anything you can grab that’s mail oriented. And you there, go with Smitty and he’ll find you something to do. Oh, but for the sake of God, put on these life vests.” He grabbed two thick white life vests from the top of a cabinet.

“You too, Smitty.” He threw Smitty a vest as well. “Put them on for your own safety. I’ll be back with some more help.” He turned and ran out the door.

Smitty turned to approach the water bubbling out of the hatch from the hold below. The water was already over their shoes and threatened their hemlines. The same hatch that just yesterday, Megan and Alice had gone in, frolicking throughout the deep storage area with not a care in the world but each other, was all underwater. Alice felt a shiver run through her as the water kept rising, high enough to start her hemline getting soaked. Her boots had already been sloshing around on her feet for a bit now. She could hardly feel her toes, they were so cold.

“Help me here, would you both? Start grabbing any sack you see and put it on top of the hatch. Maybe we can prevent some more water coming in. These sacks are oil skinned, so they might withstand a bit of water.” Smitty demonstrated what he wanted. Following suit they started stacking sack after sack upon the hatch. When the load grew heavy with enough pressure to keep the hatch door down for the moment, Smitty turned his attention to the cage. “My Lord, how have we forgotten about the Registered Mail? It’s locked and Bill has the only key. That’s the mail we should have been working on getting out of here before we sink. It is the most important.”

“Surely we are not in danger of sinking?” Alice asked.

Megan answered, “Bill’s only been gone a few minutes. He’ll be back. But I can open the locks on the doors with my hairpin. Perhaps you would like me to try? A lock is a lock, isn’t it?” Megan pulled out her hairpin again. She leaned down to insert it into the lock on the cage.

“What is the meaning of this?” Bill was back. “You’re tampering with a United States-Royal Sea Post Mail Registered Lock. How dare you?” He rushed as fast as he could through the sloshing water.

Sacks of mail floated about getting in his way as he came over to the door of the cage. He inserted his key, and the lock popped open, but he struggled with opening the door wide enough to get in. “Help me with this confounded door.” The four of them together got the door to open. Bill ran to the first fifteen sacks he saw and grabbed them. Handing three to each woman, he took the other nine and started out the door.

“Please follow me. We are going up top to the lifeboats with these.” Sloshing through the water with soaked hemlines was difficult, but pulling three bags with heavy locks on them was even more difficult. Alice struggled to keep up. She concentrated on Megan’s back. Following. As long as she was with Megan, she felt safe, even though the ship had water in it and was probably sinking. She had finally found the one. She wasn’t going to let anything get in their way, not even a sinking ship. Alice knew that Megan was as cold as she was, but all she saw from Megan was her drive to do the job they were given. She admired that about her. Alice would try to not complain too much or be a burden. If her feet were frozen, then Megan’s were too.

Once they had climbed out of the water onto the staircase, the going became much easier. They finally encountered a steward named Albert who was put into service immediately.

“Here, you are now entrusted to important items under lock and key, take them up top to the lifeboats,” Bill said.

“Lifeboats? My word, why? Ladies?” He looked down at his arms that were now full of mail bags and then back at them, a little flustered. “I’m sorry, sir, but why are you all wet?”

“I must get back. Carry on and good luck.” Bill turned to go back down into the water that continued to fill the compartments below.

“Bill, give me your hat so I can look more official,” Megan yelled at him. The hat came sailing down the hallway and landed at her feet. “Thanks, and good luck to you too.”

“Okay then, Albert is it?” Alice asked politely. “Yes, what is the quickest way to get to the stern from here? W-we are in danger of sinking, apparently. Now if you would kindly lead us in the proper direction?”

Megan said, “I know the answer. It’s Scotland Yard.”

“Yes, ma’am, you are correct. This way please.” Albert puffed up with authority as he led his new protégés toward Scotland Yard. “Could you kindly tell me what the actual problem is?” Albert questioned.

“The ship has struck an iceberg and the hull is filling up down there with water,” Megan said. “We are entrusted with this important Registered Mail and must get it up top to a lifeboat and safely off the ship.”

“And what is Scotland Yard?” Alice asked. “I seem to be the only one in the dark. I have heard of the one in England. I think it’s a police headquarters?”

“It is a long hallway that runs along the entire ship that the crew uses to deliver goods,” Megan said. “My brother told me about it that very first day of our voyage. Now, I have a question for you, Alice. Why the stern?”

“Well, we were in the bow downstairs when it was starting to flood,” Alice said, “so I would naturally go the opposite way. Thus, the stern. But that’s odd. I don’t hear anything. No propellers are turning. They must have shut them off, or we didn’t notice because we were a little overwhelmed.”

“Yes, you are so smart.” Megan looked over at Alice. “Who knows? Our efforts to save the mail might be in our favor when it comes to landing a job in New York. You are doing great. Let’s just do this one thing, and then our duty is done and we will all be in a lifeboat soon. But we have to get going, all right?” They hurried again to follow Albert.

“My arms are getting tired,” Alice moaned. “How much farther until we reach the top deck?”

“Oh, here miss, let me take a couple more from you, and you too, miss. It’s the locks that are the heavy things. The things inside are feather weight.” Albert reached for two sacks from each of them. “Up we go then.” He motioned to the stairs.

“Isn’t the elevator working?” Megan asked. “I can’t see all of us trudging up four more flights of stairs.”

“They were when I came down, but that was a bit ago now. Let’s go have us a see, all right?”

As they reached the elevator and pushed the button for the car they all lowered their sacks onto the floor. The elevator arrived and they dragged all the sacks into the car and jumped in after them.

“Go up to the top. Do not stop for anyone. That is an order,” Albert barked. The elevator operator raised his eyebrows but obeyed.

Megan grabbed for Alice’s hand and looked her in the eyes. “Are you all right? I don’t really understand any of this, but I do know we’re helping. Stay with me and we both will be fine. I love you.”

Alice started to say something but the door opened and chaos arrived. Alice tucked her arm into Megan’s, grabbed her sack, and walked off into it.

People were everywhere. Some were bewildered, carrying everything they owned in their arms. Mothers held crying children, people clung to their loved ones as they stood in line to board a lifeboat, while others waited patiently. Alice and Megan followed Albert. They reached a lifeboat, only to find it already being lowered.

“Try over there,” Albert said, pointing to the next boat in line. “There might be some further down this way. I’ll go on and you start here.” He ran off carrying most of the Registered Mail sacks.

“Thank you, good luck,” Megan cried. Alice was sure the sentiment was lost in the wind. “Let’s get on this one, Alice. It’s starting to be lowered.”

The lifeboat had about twenty-five people, mostly well-dressed ladies and young children. Bewilderment shone in their eyes. There seemed to be room, but was there enough time? The ship was starting to take on a definite tilt as if they were walking uphill. Then Alice heard her name called in a genteel voice. The voice was Helene’s.

# Chapter Nineteen

## 15 April 1912 — Midnight

“OH, EMILY, I don’t know what I was thinking before I met you. To imagine that I could be in love with Alice. I do love her, but now that I know, I mean, know what the difference is, well, I was so naïve. You have shown me the world in these last few hours.” Frances gushed out the words to Emily, who cradled her down on her bosom, lovingly, but controlled. “I don’t know if it was the wine or the company that drew me to you. Like a moth to a light, a bright burning light that made me explode. Now, it is not only in my dreams. It is here with you.”

“Oh, well, umm, thank you,” Emily murmured.

Suddenly the door flew open and Ethan appeared, looking very worried and frazzled. Ethan wore a life vest, but it was not tied and it flapped when he walked. “Oh, here you are, and with her?” Ethan pointed at Frances. “Well, I am most sorry about this, but you both need to get up and get dressed at once and put on a life vest. Then follow me to the lifeboats. We’re sinking. We’ve struck an iceberg and we have to get off before we can’t. Hurry, now, please hurry. Make haste.”

Emily got up so quickly she nearly threw Frances to the floor. She had no doubt that what Ethan had said was true. Even he couldn’t come up with something that outrageous.

“Here, you’d best put on your own clothing,” Emily said. “And take one of my coats. It’s cold out tonight. Keep warm until I can keep you warmer.” Emily scurried around dressing herself. Frances threw on her petticoat and reached for her corset. “Not that,” Emily snapped. “There’s no time.” When they were presentable they emerged into the sitting room. There, Ethan helped them into life vests and out to the awaiting boats.

Bedlam surrounded them. People were running, dragging trunks and suitcases with them, thinking they were all going to be saved, and their belongings too. The crew was slowly letting the lifeboats down to the water, working with a crane. The crewmen pushed and pulled at the boats trying to get them ready for boarding. Emily overheard a woman tell her husband that she had heard it was only for a little while, that there was a fire in one of the coal rooms. They needed everyone off the ship, but only for a little while. Emily breathed easier. Ethan led them to where the Cheswicks stood just inside the dining room doors keeping warm.

Frances hugged her mother and father and looked around. “Where’s Alice?”

“We thought she would be with you,” Helene said.

Emily ignored the talk about Alice. Second Class could take care of itself. She looked over at Ethan. He was being so brave. Soon they would all get on a boat and row out a bit, and just come back. Then they all heard it.

“Women and children first. Women and children only!” a steward yelled out to the crowd.

The urgency of those few words sucked the life out of most men. Wives clung to husbands, lovers clung to each other, and very quickly the few remaining lifeboats were loaded. This was no drill.

Emily watched as Helene grabbed Fletcher and started crying. “No, no, you cannot make me go without you. I love you. You will die if you stay here. You must come with me. I have nothing if I don’t have you. When we first boarded *Titanic*, I was so depressed to the point of losing myself, but I have recently discovered why I fell in love with you in the first place. I’d forgotten, but now I’ll never forget. Never,” Helene wailed as she was pulled from Fletcher’s arms.

Emily couldn’t stand it. She screamed at the quartermaster, “You cannot do this. We’ve paid more than a lot of these other women. You should let the families on board that can pay!”

“Women and children only,” the steward said. “This is the word from the Captain, not from you, madam. Come along, in you go, you too, miss. You men, over there, go inside so it will make it easier on the women. Come on, gents. Show a backbone in front of the ladies.”

Fletcher gave Frances a hug and said, “Take care of your mother for me whilst I’m away. You know how distraught she gets.” Fletcher kissed Frances on her forehead. “Go on, be a good girl.”

“Come on now, Helene. It’s only for a while, then we will come back,” Emily said encouragingly, though she didn’t believe it herself. “Come sit by Frances and me.” Helene stepped in the boat, followed by Frances and Emily, and they all sat together. Frances put her arms around her mother and held her tight.

“All right then, this boat is full. Lower away,” the crane man called. The lifeboat jerked into balance with three cranes lowering the apparatus, but suddenly one slipped leaving the other two to catch up, and the lifeboat jerked again. Those on the lifeboat desperately searched the decks for their loved ones still on board. Emily was searching for Ethan when she realized that Alice had just run by.

“Alice!” Helene screamed.

Alice and Megan stopped running and stared out at the lifeboat being lowered.

“You must come with us at once,” Helene sounded off with her mother voice. “I insist.”

“Is there room enough for both of us?” Alice asked. “And these mail sacks?”

“No, I don’t think so,” Helene said. “We hardly know that girl anyway. And why do you have those dirty mail sacks? It’s appalling. Get in.”

“If this helps, I forgive you,” Emily stated flatly. “There now, I’ve said it. Get in the boat, please. It will save your life.” She didn’t want Alice to die after all. She could still be of some use, later on down the line.

“But what about Megan?” Alice pleaded with them.

“There’s no room,” Emily said. “Only you. We are overcrowded as it is. But you must jump before it is too late.”

Out of the blue shot Ethan. “If you won’t go, then I will. I’ll save your precious mail.” He grabbed the two mail sacks from Alice and Megan. Clutching the bags, he leapt out towards the lowering lifeboat, but he misjudged his trajectory. The weight of the mail sacks, with their heavy locks, propelled him too far. He overshot the boat.

Emily watched with a smile as she recognized Ethan flying through the air toward the lifeboat. “Catch him!” she cried. Reaching out, her hand grazed Ethan’s. His feet hit the edge of the lifeboat and he teetered for a moment, and then the weight of the bags in his left hand with the strings tangled around his fingers, flung him further out beyond the lifeboat. A dull splash sounded as he hit the cold water below. The loose life vest that he wore slipped off. He disappeared into the black water, along with the sacks of Registered Mail. His life vest floated on top of the water. Empty.

“Ethan!” Emily screamed his name as he slipped out of her grasp into the dark, black sea. “Ethan! Oh my God, get us down there. We have to save him. Please, please get us down to the water. Maybe he’ll bob back up. I need to help him, to find him.” Emily pleaded and begged as she watched in horror as Ethan’s body failed to reappear.

Helene continued to plead with Alice to get into the boat. “You’re one of us, darling.”

“Clearly I am not,” Alice said, “because I am choosing to stay here and find another way. Goodbye. Thank you for all you have done for me. I release you from all obligations concerning me.” As she turned to go, she said, “Come on Megan. Let’s go to the other side and find another way.”

JACOB WAS BESIDE himself. How could he get his daughter out of the stack and into a lifeboat when he had to stay here and help put the lifeboats into the water? He just had to come up with a plausible excuse to go save them. Suddenly a loud argument broke out on the stern, giving him the excuse he needed.

“Excuse me sir. I see some mishap going on back toward the stern. Mind if I go have a see?”

The midshipman looked down the deck. He was too frazzled to argue. “Go on. See what you can do.”

With that said, Jacob was off. He glanced over his shoulder to make sure he wasn’t being watched, then darted into the small alcove and started climbing the ladder. He wondered what he should do if he found them in a compromising position? He nodded his head, thinking that it was actually good if he did catch them. He loved Colin like a son already, and that meant all the more if his Alexandria loved him back. He’d have his blood matching a Mahoney’s strong bloodline that would, indeed, be a fine match. He opened the door without a ping warning to the inhabitants, climbed over the threshold and said, “Come on now. Get up and dressed.” As he expected, they lay in bed. “We’ve no need for explanations at this time. We have struck an iceberg and we seem to be going down from the bow section.” They both sat up. “We’re sinking I’m afraid, quite quickly. You need to get off the ship. Get up. Get dressed.” Jacob turned his back to grant them some privacy. “I would not trade these past few days with anyone,” he said, trying to keep his voice steady. He did not want to frighten them, but he doubted he would have another chance to say what he needed to say. “I am so grateful for the chance I had to embrace my flesh and blood. Nothing makes me prouder than you, Alexandria. Now, let’s go and save the both of you.”

He turned back around. Alexandria was dressed and Colin was pulling on his boots. Jacob grabbed two life vests from the shelf he’d built with his own hands. “Here, put these on. We must get back to the lifeboats before there are not any left.” Jacob headed for the door. “Leave everything else. We must hurry.”

“I’m not leaving without Violet,” Colin said, grabbing his violin. “Come on then.”

They followed Jacob down the ladder.

JACOB LED COLIN and Alexandria around the stern to the first available lifeboat but Alexandria refused to get into it without Colin.

“No, I do not wish to be saved without you. I wish to stay with you and Papa.”

Colin and Jacob exchanged a look. They each took one of Alexandria's arms and lifted her into the lifeboat. She sank onto the seat and cried, big sobbing gasps. Colin hated to leave her.

Wally walked by with the other band members. "Set up your instruments, boys," Wally said. "Keep it lively, like the Captain said."

Colin followed, his case in hand.

Wally turned. "Colin, what are you doing?"

"Now that Alexandria is settled in a lifeboat, I would be honored to play with you until the end. If this is what is to be, then have at it, right?" Colin asked.

Wally replied, "You don't work for the Black Brothers. Get into this lifeboat with your friend and live."

Colin shook his head. "I will accompany you and the gents and go down like a man."

"No my friend, this is where you are wrong. You have a special gift with music. Do not cheat the world of your talent. The world needs to hear you."

Suddenly Wally grabbed Violet and gave the violin a hefty throw overboard. Instinctively, Colin lunged for the violin but, as Wally must have known it would, his lunge carried him overboard and he tumbled into the lifeboat, along with Alexandria and Violet, as it was lowered to the sea.



# Chapter Twenty

## 15 April 1912 — Early Morning

MEGAN LOOKED AROUND at the people surrounding them, some trying desperately to cling to loved ones as they were ripped from their arms and shoved into lifeboats, others crying. Confusion rapidly filled the air.

“How much time do you think we have left? I mean, you know, before we sink?” Alice asked.

Megan saw the pandemonium escalating around them and said, “By the looks of things, not too much longer. We saw it with our own eyes downstairs, how quickly the water was rising up out of the hold into the mailroom. I wonder if the men got out before the hold was completely immersed. And now that we have failed in our job of saving the Registered Mail, we had better figure something else out or we, too, shall perish. My poor trunk. I’ll never see it again.” Glancing down at her bracelet, Megan said, “At least I have this. When we get rescued, we can use it for stake money to purchase some land or travel somewhere we can be free.”

“Rescued? We have to get off this ship first,” Alice said. “We just gave away a spot in a lifeboat. Ethan has died trying to save himself. My family, or what I have of family, are out in the ocean somewhere, and we’re still here, on this sinking ship. You have a plan, don’t you Megan?” Alice asked. “Please tell me you have a plan. What’s going on inside that head of yours?”

“I have an idea, love. I’m not sure it will work, but we’re running out of options. Go and gather as many life vests as you can carry and bring them back here. It’s a crazy idea, but if you have a better one I’m willing to listen.”

“I don’t have one at all,” Alice said. “Kiss me quick, and I shall go.”

Megan gathered Alice into her arms, heedless of the other passengers who might see them. They embraced, followed by a passionate kiss. “Hurry back, love.”

Megan began gathering all the table linen she could find. She saw a stack of deck chairs shoved to the side. She ran over to them with all the linen in her arms. Quickly she spread four chairs into a square. She lashed them together with the linen, tying passable knots to help them stay together. She figured they could tie the life jackets on top of the chairs and themselves on top of the life jackets. If they could stay out of the water, they had a chance of surviving.

Alice came back with her arms full of life vests. She examined the square of linen and chairs and threw the vests on top. Using the ties that were attached to the vests, they further tied them to the chairs. Soon they had a big pile of items stacked on top of one another and Megan climbed on top of it all.

“Come on up here, we need to be on top of this makeshift raft before we hit the water. Maybe we’ll get lucky and it won’t pull us under with the suction the ship is bound to create. She may flounder a bit, before she dies. I want us to have that chance. Oh look.” Flares lit up the sky. “That will help the other ships coming to our rescue.”

The sky was bright with stars. Megan's mind reeled from everything she saw. The ship was tilted halfway out of the water. The water was rapidly advancing towards them. It was amazing that the ship was still aglow with light and music. She wondered if Colin was playing. The wall behind them was helping to keep their strange contraption in one place as the floor tilted. At least she had picked a good spot. She watched as people streamed by, few noticing them and most hurrying on their way with crazy plans of their own. Megan glanced down at Alice and put on a brave smile. "Come now, up with you. We will be better able to see from up here. I just want us to be ready. For what, I don't know, just ready."

Up Alice climbed to the top of their raft and Megan tied her to it as best she could with the ties of her life jacket. The water line was coming to them instead of making them go to it. The tilt of *Titanic* was causing items to fall over and crash into other things. Breaking glass, people shouting, moaning and crying, and sounds of sobbing, desperate men, were some of the things that Megan heard. She grabbed onto Alice and held her tight. Suddenly there was a terrible shudder on the ship and a couple of small explosions. The ship sounded like it was breaking apart.

"Hold on to me," Megan cried. "Try and hold your breath, for as long as you can. Don't give up. We will be rescued. I love you, Alice. We're going to make it, I know it. I didn't come all this way to find you and then die before we can have a life. Just hold on to me."

"I love you, Megan," Alice sobbed. "I love you. If we have to die, at least we'll be together."

The sounds were horrendous. Loud voices screamed and moaned. People jumped overboard trying to save themselves. It was every man for himself, or woman. The loud rumbling and shuddering of the deck made Alice scream and hold even tighter to Megan. Suddenly, the bow, by the last funnel, Jacob's funnel, broke away. The ship gave an awful lurch and snapped in two. A surge of water lifted the makeshift raft and swept it off the deck. "Here we go. Hold your breath."

Several men tried to grab hold of the raft as it hit the open water of the ocean. Two of them latched on. "Let go!" Megan cried. "You'll swamp us." But it was too late. The raft shifted positions and flipped. Megan and Alice were now underwater, trapped by the ties of their life jackets. The needles of the icy water stung so bad it felt like a million sharp needles pricking Megan's body with instant pain. She hadn't thought about this part. She felt herself being thrown about the ocean like a Ping-Pong ball. Her lungs burned. Another wave appeared and flipped the raft over again, with them on the top. One man miraculously still held on. He had one hand tight on the ends of a trailing jacket line. He bobbed a moment, his head went underwater, and his hand let go.

Megan saw what remained of the ship, flat on the sea again, and realized that the settling ship had saved their lives. Its landing must have caused the wave that flipped them back over. The water around the ship was crowded with screaming people. The raft had been swept too far away for Megan to help anyone. She watched as some tried to swim to the raft, but grew weak, gave up and sank into oblivion.

They had landed upright and were floating. The raft drifted on the dark sea, waves catching the moonlight at their crest and reflecting it back to the skies. They looked at each other and burst into tears. Megan saw their hands, still clinched in a death grip with one another. Slowly, she pried open her fingers. They felt as if they would break right off if she wasn't careful. Panting, trying to catch her breath, Megan tried to untie the life vest that held her to the raft so she could reach Alice. Alice beat her to it. Alice crawled into Megan's arms, and Megan

gathered her to her breast, cooing and holding her tight. She raised her eyes to the stars above and gave a quick round of thanks. So far, at least, they were alive.

Shivering and cold, Megan and Alice untied their vests and then put them back on to better position themselves on the raft. They shivered uncontrollably in their wet clothing and Megan knew they could not survive long, being so wet, without rescue. "Help!" Megan cried, not really expecting an answer, but a reply came from very close at hand.

"Over here."

A lifeboat pulled alongside them, and many hands helped them climb over from the raft into the lifeboat. Not one word was spoken while it happened. Was everyone in shock? Megan and Alice were put into the bow of the lifeboat. Warm coats were given to them, and they both fell into each other's arms for warmth and comfort.

She looked back at what was left of the ship. Megan was horrified to realize they had just been on that top deck. She watched as the stern rose high in the sky. It stayed there for a moment before starting her plunge into the ocean. They listened in horror to cries for help and splashes when people fell or jumped. Huddled as they were, they witnessed the spectacular sinking of the rest of the ship. A huge, black mass filled the star-struck skies and then rapidly sank into the cold, black sea of oblivion. Soon the sounds of pain, anguish, and grief stopped penetrating the night air as the remaining souls perished in the icy water.

At first she thought it was silent, but then Megan heard the soft crying of the many cast out across the water in lifeboats like theirs. She almost wept to think Colin was among those who perished.

Suddenly a sweet sound penetrated the night air. Everyone on the lifeboat perked up.

"That's it!" Alice exclaimed. "That's the song I've been asking about this whole time. I've always found it so soothing. Do you know what it is? Do you recognize it?"

"Yes love, I do," Megan sighed. "I would know that song anywhere and the sound of that violin too. Now I know in my heart that Colin is safe. That's his favorite song to play when he's feeling blue. 'Tis the 'Irish Blessing.'" Megan said the words she knew by heart.

"May the road rise up to meet you, may the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face, the rain falls soft upon your fields. And until we meet again someday, may God hold you in the palm of his hand. May the memories that we have shared, linger on and on."

Megan smiled. "Now I know Colin is safe, then there must be others. When we get rescued we should look for—"

"No." Alice cut Megan off. "I think I want to stay lost from the Cheswicks and from Emily, but not from you. I only wish to go away and start a new life somewhere, anywhere with you. You have saved my life in so many ways that the others have not. Especially the Cheswicks. They did give me a house to live in, but never a home. That's what I want with you. A new life, a new home." Alice reached up to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. Her fingers touched something hard under her collar. "Oh my Lord, the hairpin that Emily gave me is still in my hair. It must have gotten caught up in my life jacket." She pulled it out and touched the stones.

"I bet these are real, aren't they? What else could they be? It's beautiful, isn't it?" Megan asked.

"Yes, she had spouted they were diamonds, so it is and it's mine. As far as I'm concerned, I earned it. I can do whatever I want and no one can tell me no, not anymore," Alice whispered with conviction.

Huddled together, whispering, they soon fell into a slumber-like drift. It was dawn before Megan awoke to a voice coming to them over the water.

“This is the *Carpathia*, here to help you,” she heard. Megan noticed the ship wasn’t as large as *Titanic*. How many of us survived? She looked out onto the water, and saw large pieces of ice floating, so close. Why hadn’t they hit any while floating all these hours? All these unanswered questions.

EMILY, FRANCES, AND Helene walked the lower deck of the *Carpathia*, searching for anyone they knew, especially Alice and Megan. There was no hope for Ethan. “I told you that this would be a complete waste of time, now didn’t I?” Emily asked. “I knew we wouldn’t find them.” Frances and Helene had already searched everywhere on the *Carpathia* they could think of. The common rooms and dining areas filled with all those mattresses and makeshift bedding, with people in them who were not their loved ones. They’d checked the manifest and talked to other survivors. “They’re gone, just like Ethan.”

“I so hoped at least one of them would be found. Not only have we lost poor Fletcher, but Ethan and my sweet Alice too.” Helene wept.

Emily noticed that now Frances was also crying. She knew that Frances was missing Alice and her father, but damn it, she had lost Ethan.

“Let’s go back to our little sleeping area and wait out these last two days,” Emily said. “They say we will be docking in New York late Thursday evening. I can’t wait. I don’t have to tell either one of you how grateful I am to have you both here with me. I’m exhausted.” She was tired of hearing people weep. She was tired of the putrid smell coming from the dirty, damp people. She was too tired to care. Emily put her hand over her forehead as she walked back to the stairs. The others followed like obedient puppies.

# Chapter Twenty-one

## 17 April 1912 — Afternoon

ALICE AND MEGAN leaned on the gunnels of *Carpathia* and stared out at the sea. “The sun feels so warm,” Alice said as she lifted her face toward the sun.

“Being cooped up in that infirmary, at first I thought I was in heaven,” Megan said. “They wrapped me in warm blankets, and I was drifting again, when I thought, wait, heaven wouldn’t be this noisy. As if I would know what heaven would be like?”

“Just to breathe fresh air is wonderful by itself.”

Megan smiled over at Alice. She also enjoyed the sun beating down on her face. There was a nip still in the air, but it was better than smelling all the extra people cooped up on board *Carpathia*, which was never intended to hold that many people. Some, like them, were wet, then dry and wrinkled.

“Will you look at that,” Megan said. “My watch stopped at exactly 2:14. That must have been the time that the ship broke apart and we were thrown into the ocean, twirling round and round underneath for what seemed hours. It must have been less than minutes, really,” Megan said. “Not too serviceable now, is it?”

“No, but we shall always have a memento of the time when your ingenious idea saved our lives. In so many ways, I cannot begin to count.” Alice reached down the front of her dress. “We also have this. I’d forgotten about it, but it survived everything. It’s the negative of the photograph of you, me, and Franny. We can get photographs made from it to remember Franny forever.” A concerned look crossed Alice’s face. “Have they asked our names yet? I’ve forgotten if they have.”

“No, not yet. We were asleep the first time around, and out here the second.”

“Well, I’ve been thinking. No one knows we’re alive. Everyone has lost someone. Neither the Cheswicks nor Emily has come looking for me. I said my goodbyes on board *Titanic*. I’ve nothing more to say,” Alice said with a sad voice. “Let’s stay lost, Megan. It’s only me and you. No paperwork to speak of. It all went down with our trunks and valuables anyway.”

A heavy sigh came out of Megan as she thought of her beautiful trunk, now at the bottom of the ocean. She reached over to her sleeve to feel it. Oh darn, she had lost the photo of Franny, Alice and herself. But they did have the negative.

“Here’s what I’m thinking,” Alice said. “Should anyone ask, we were both married to the brothers MacPhearson, James and John, who both went down with *Titanic*. No one will question our word and then we can both have the same last name. As sisters-in-law we can live together without explaining a thing. What do you think? It is a combination of both our names. I would like to also change the spelling of mine to A-L-Y-C-E. It reflects how you say my name. I like that.”

“I’d like us to start with new identities in this new land of opportunities,” Megan said. “Together, with one name, as one family. Our family.”

Megan wrapped Alyce up again in the blanket that had fallen by the wayside. So many emotions whirled through her. Yes, it was what she wanted. She did want a new life, with a mate by her side, to share in the joy, and with luck, not too much sorrow. Not if she could help it.

“I like the name, MacPhearson,” Megan said. “It sounds strong. Yes, love, I also like the idea of joining forces. It is what kept us from dying back there, I think. I should change my spelling then to M-E-G-H-A-N. Adding the H might throw anyone off from connecting the dots. It is the old world spelling again, and here my folks thought they were being ahead of the times then with my spelling. Now that I know Colin is safe with Alexandria, I’m fine.” She turned to Alyce and took her hand. “Do you, Alyce MacPhearson, take me, Meghan MacPhearson to be my mate for life?”

Alyce gazed lovingly at Meghan. “Yes, love, I do. I was struck by you the first moment you looked me in the eye. I’ll always remember you in that hat that was too big on your head. You were so cute. I knew there was something special about you, even then.”

Meghan kissed Alyce, sealing the arrangement. “That’s a funny thing to remember. I remember you were flirting with me. You were, weren’t you? Well, I’m glad we are almost to New York.” Not waiting for an answer, they went inside to wait for the next day to finally arrive.

After they were completely thawed, they were moved from the infirmary to the Third Class lounge area with two extra cots. Both were asleep within minutes of lying down.

Evening was approaching on the last day. As the horn blew three times indicating land, Meghan and Alyce grabbed for each other in jubilation and happiness. They kissed in public, not caring what others thought. They were alive. The *Carpathia* was a damaged ship, not physically, but with the memories of the many souls lost and left behind.

“It will be a cold day in hell before you get me on another ship, I’ll tell you that,” Meghan said. “Take me inland. America is our, what is it, oyster, lobster, one of those crustaceans? We have survived this disaster at sea, and we can survive anything, as long as we are together,” Meghan said, standing arm in arm with Alyce.

The Statue of Liberty stood proudly as the *Carpathia* slowly passed by.

Meghan grabbed Alyce’s other hand and said, “Welcome to America, Mrs. MacPhearson.”

**The End**

## About the Author

Tonie lives in the Pacific Northwest with her wife, author Kate McLachlan, and a menagerie of animals. “Struck” the album, all songs written and performed by Tonie Chacon, can be found at [www.cdbaby.com/cd/toniechacon](http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/toniechacon). Contact Tonie at [toniechacon@yahoo.com](mailto:toniechacon@yahoo.com) or through her website at [www.toniechacon.homestead.com](http://www.toniechacon.homestead.com) *Struck! A Titanic Love Story* is Tonie’s first novel.

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