

LUCK  
— OF THE —  
TITANIC



STACEY LEE

putnam

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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*To my number one son, Bennett.  
There are no cowboys in this one,  
but there are a few sailors.*



OF THE EIGHT CHINESE PASSENGERS  
ABOARD THE *TITANIC*, SIX SURVIVED.



# LIST OF CHARACTERS ABOARD THE TITANIC

## THIRD-CLASS PASSENGERS

- Valora Luck
- James Luck
- Chow “Bo” Wah
- Wink
- Olly
- Drummer
- Ming Lai
- Fong
- Tao
- Heath Bledig
- Dina Domenic & Mr. and Mrs. Domenic

## FIRST-CLASS PASSENGERS

- “Amberly Sloane”
- April Hart & Mrs. Hart
- Charlotte Fine & Mrs. Fine
- Albert Ankeny Stewart & valet “Croggy” Crawford
- J. Bruce Ismay, chairman of White Star Line
- Lady Lucy Duff-Gordon & Sir Cosmo Duff-Gordon
- Bertha Chambers

## CREW

- Captain Edward Smith
- Andy Latimer, first-class steward
- “Skeleton,” third-class steward
- Officer Merry
- “QM,” Quartermaster
- “Master-of-Big-Arms,” Master-at-Arms
- Brandish, lead fireman
- Baxter, first-class porter

*diagram tk*



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## VALOR AND VIRTUE

*The captain paced his weathered deck,  
A-talkin' to his boots.  
They were his pride and joy, you see,  
Anchored him like roots.  
The right one he named Valor;  
It always steered his course.  
The left one he called Virtue;  
'Twas steady as a horse.*

*Together, they had saved him from  
Many a tottery fall.  
Gripped the wood like tentacles,  
In tempest, twirl, or squall.  
He never took them off, did he,  
Not even when he bathed.  
Which wasn't very oft, 'tis true,  
The same as when he shaved.*

*But even boots outwear their seams;  
Their leather cracks and splits.  
And one day Valor sprang a leak,  
And Virtue's heel went quits.  
When the Captain surveyed, at the end of his legs,  
The boots, like ragged jerky,  
He cried, "Woe is me," threw them to sea,  
Then pitched himself into the murky.*





APRIL 10, 1912

When my twin, Jamie, left, he vowed it wouldn't be forever. Only a week before Halley's Comet brushed the London skies, he kissed my cheek and set off. One comet in, one comet out. But two years away is more than enough time to clear his head, even in the coal-thickened air at the bottom of a steamship. Since he hasn't come home, it is time to chase down the comet's tail.

I try not to fidget while I wait my turn on the first-class gangway of White Star Line's newest ocean liner. A roofed corridor—to spare the nobs the inconvenience of sunshine—leads directly from the “boat train” depot to this highest crossing. At least we are far from the rats on Southampton dock below, which is crawling with them.

Of course, some up here might consider me a rat.

The couple ahead of me eyes me warily, even though I am dressed in one of Mrs. Sloane's smartest traveling suits—shark grey to match her usual temper, with a swath of black bee-swarm lace pinned from shoulder to shoulder. A lifetime of those dodgy looks teaches you to ignore them. Haven't I already survived the journey from London? A half a day's

travel, packed into a smoky railcar, next to a man who stank of sardines. And here I am, so close to the finish line, I can nearly smell Jamie—like trampled ryegrass and the milk biscuits he is so fond of eating.

An ocean breeze cools my cheeks. Several stories below in either direction, onlookers crowd the dock, staring up at the ship rising six stories before them. Its hull gleams, a wall of liquid black with a quartet of smokestacks so wide you could drive a train through them. Stately letters march across its side: “TITANIC.” On the third-class gangway a hundred feet to my left, passengers sport a variety of costume: headscarves, patterned kaftans, fringed shawls of botany wool, tasseled caps, and plain dungarees and straw hats. I don’t see a single Chinese face among them. Has Jamie boarded already? With this crowd, I may have missed him.

Then again, he isn’t traveling alone, but with seven other Chinese men from his company. All are being transported to Cuba for a new route after coal strikes here berthed their steamship.

Something cold unspools in my belly. I received his last letter a month ago. Time enough for things to change. What if Jamie’s company decided to send them somewhere other than Cuba, maybe a new route in Asia or Africa?

The line shifts. Only a few more passengers ahead of me.

*Jamie!* I call in my mind, a game I often played growing up. He doesn’t always hear, but I like to think he does when it matters.

In China, a dragon-phoenix pair of boy and girl twins is

considered auspicious, and so Ba bought two suckling pigs to celebrate our birth, roasted side by side to show their common lot. Some may think that macabre, but to the Chinese, death is just a continuation of life on a higher plane with our ancestors.

*Jamie, your sister is here. Look for me.*

Won't he be surprised to see me? Shocked may be more accurate—Jamie has never handled surprise well—but I will get him to see that it is time for him, for *us*, to move on to bigger and better things, just as our father hoped.

I think back to the telegram I sent him when Ba passed five months ago.

Ba hit his head on post and died. Please come home. Ever your Val.

Jamie wrote back:

Rec'd news and hope you are bearing up okay.  
Very sorry, but I have eight months left on my contract and cannot get away. Write me details.  
Your Jamie.

Jamie would have known that Ba had been drunk when he hit his head, and I knew he wouldn't mourn like I had. When you live with someone whose mistress is the bottle, you say your goodbyes long before they depart.

Someone behind me clears her throat. A woman in a

pinstriped “menswear” suit that fits her slender figure like stripes on a zebra watches me, an ironic smile wrapped around her cigarette. I put her in her early twenties. Somehow dressing in men’s clothing seems to heighten her femininity, with her creamy skin and dark hair that swings to her delicate chin. She lifts that chin toward the entrance, where a severe-looking officer stands like a box nail, a puzzled look on his face.

I bound forward on the balls of my feet, muscled from years of tightrope practice. Ba started training Jamie and me in the acrobatic arts as soon as we could walk. Sometimes, our acts were the only thing putting food on the table.

The severe officer watches me pull my ticket from my velvet handbag.

Mrs. Sloane, my employer, secretly purchased tickets for the two of us with her dragon’s hoard of money. She didn’t tell her son or his wife about the trip, or that she might stay in America indefinitely to get away from their money-grubbing fists and greedy stares. After her unexpected demise, I couldn’t just let the tickets go to waste.

“Afternoon, sir. I am Valora Luck.”

The officer glances at the name written on my ticket, then back at me, his steep cheekbones sharp enough for a bird to land on. His navy visor with its distinctive company logo—a gold wreath circling a red flag with a white star—levers as he inspects me. “Destination?”

“New York, same as the rest.” Is that a trick question?



“New York, huh. Documentation?”

“You’re holding it right there, sir,” I say brightly, feeling the gangway shift uncomfortably.

He exchanges a guarded look with the crewman holding the passenger log. “Luck?”

“Yes.” In Cantonese, our surname sounds more like “Luke,” but the British like to pronounce it “luck.” Ba had decided to embrace good fortune and spell it that way, too. He’d intended the lofty-sounding name “Valor” for Jamie, and “Virtue” for me—after a sea shanty about a pair of boots—but my British mum put the brakes on that. Instead, she named my brother James, and I got Valora. It’s a toss-up as to which of us is more relieved.

“You’re Chinese, right?”

“Half of me.” Mum married Ba against the wishes of her father, a vicar in the local parish.

“Then at least half of you needs documentation. Ain’t you heard of the Chinese Exclusion Act? You can’t go to America without papers. That’s just how it is.”

“Wh-what?” A pang of fear slices through me. The Chinese *Exclusion* Act. What madness is this? They don’t like us here in England, but clearly, they *really* don’t like us in America. “But my brother’s on this ship, too, with the members of the Atlantic Steam Company. They’re all Chinese. Did they get on?”

“I don’t keep the third-class register. You’ll need to get off my gangway.”

“B-but my lady will be expecting me.”

“Where is she?”

I was prepared for this question. “Mrs. Sloane wanted me to board first to make sure her room was ready.” Of course, she had already pushed off on a different ship, one that wouldn’t be making a return journey, causing me great inconvenience. “We had her trunk forwarded here a week ago. I must lay out her things.” Mum’s Bible is in that trunk, within its pages my only picture of her and Ba. At last, my family will be reunited, even if it is just with a photo of our parents.

“Well, you’re not getting on this ship without the proper documentation.” He waves the ticket. “I’ll keep this for her for when she boards. Next!”

Waiting passengers begin to grumble behind me, but I ignore them. “No, please! I must board! I must—”

“Robert, escort this girl off.”

The crewman beside the severe officer grabs my arm.

I shake him off, trying to muster a bit of respect. “I will see myself off.”

The slender woman behind me steps aside to allow others to go before her, her amber eyes curiously assessing me. “I saw a group of Chinese men enter the ship early this morning,” she says in the no-nonsense tone Americans use. “Maybe your brother was one of them.”

“Thank you,” I say, grateful for the unexpected charity.

A family pushes past me, and I lose the woman in a flurry of people, parcels, and hats. I find myself being squeezed back into the train depot, like a piece of indigestible meat. Mrs.

Sloane would've never stood for this outrage. Probably a rich lady like her would have persuaded them to let me on. But there is no one to speak for me now. I descend the staircase, then exit the depot onto the quay. The glare from the overcast sky cuts my eyes.

I figured the hardest part of this endeavor would be getting on without Mrs. Sloane. Never could I have foreseen this complication. What now? I need to be on that ship, or it could be months, maybe years, before I see Jamie again.

Something skirts over my boot and I recoil. A rat. They are certainly bold here, called by the peanut peddlers and meat pie hawkers. I shrink away from a pile of crates, where the rodents are making short work of a melon rind. The river slaps a rhythm against *Titanic's* hull, and my heart beats double time with the slosh.

Taking the American's advice, I make tracks for the third-class entrance farther down the quay toward the bow. Unlike in the first class, passengers crowd the gangway, tightening the queue as I near. I straighten my jacket. "I'm sorry, I just need to check if my brother made it through. Please, let me pass."

A man with a dark mustache chastises me in a foreign tongue, then jerks his head toward the end of the line. Heads nod, cutting me suspicious glares, and people move to block me. Seems wearing first-class clothes will not gain me any advantage here.

Perhaps things would be different if I looked less like Ba and more like Mum. I exhale my frustration, a wind heated

by a lifetime of being turned away for no good cause. Then I continue farther along the quay to the end of the line, passing dockworkers manhandling ropes and a navy uniform shining a torch into people's eyeballs. They don't check the first class for disease.

Beyond the nose of the ship, a couple of tugboats line up, ready to tow the *Titanic* from her mooring. Voices rise as people look up to a massive crane on the bow lowering a hoisting platform onto the quay ten paces away. A horn honks, and the queue shifts, making way for a sleek, cinnamon-red Renault motorcar. It stops right before the hoisting platform.

It could take an hour to reach the gangway from here. But even if Jamie has boarded, they still won't let me on that ship without papers. Then the *Titanic* will leave, and he will be lost to me, possibly forever. His letters to me will be undeliverable at the Sloanes', and I will have no way of knowing which new route he was assigned. Jamie is the only family I have left. I won't let him idle his time on a steamship, when he is destined for better things. Great things.

A woman with large nostrils glances at me, then pulls her son closer, spilling some of the peanuts from his paper cone. A rat slithers out from behind a crate and quietly feasts. "Stay away from that one. I've heard they eat dogs."

Barely glancing at me, the boy returns his attention to the Renault.

A crewman gestures at the dockworkers positioned on either side of the car. "Easy now. Load her on."

I am getting on that ship, by hook or by crook. Jamie is

there, and I won't let him leave without me. As for the Chinese Exclusion Act, put out the fire on your trousers before worrying about the one down the street. But how will I board?

The hoisting platform sways on its hook, the stage just big enough to hold the motorcar. A crewman reaches up and guides it the last few feet to the quay.

By *hook*.

I bounce on the balls of my feet, my muscles twitching. There are more ways onto the *Titanic* than the gangways.



I shade my eyes. The ride up stretches a couple hundred feet, with no walls and no safety net in case something should slide off the platform. I will have to stow away before the platform begins to rise. The car makes a poor hiding spot with its open design, but I can slide underneath and hope no one looks.

It'll be like the times Jamie and I snuck rides aboard the drays about town, slipping on and off without being seen. London is full of distractions. Of course, we usually only needed to distract the driver. The ship with its many port-holes suddenly looms like a wall of prying eyes. More pressing are the hundreds of eyes right here on the quay.

I look wildly about for a ruse to distract everyone. Maybe someone is carrying a firearm and I can somehow get him to fire it into the sky. Right. And then maybe a flock of flamingoes will fly in from Africa and a marching band will appear.

Another rat sniffs around my boot, its tail worming behind it. I begin to kick it away but stop. I don't like rats, but they don't give me hysterical fits like they do Mrs. Sloane's daughter-in-law, who boxed my ears when she found one in the pantry. Of course, after this, they might.

Retreating to the train depot a few paces away, I put my back to the wall and tie the ribbons on my black hat tight. Mrs. Sloane gave the hat to me, saying its short brim made her look like a garden hoe. I pull a tin of milk biscuits from my handbag and set the handbag on the ground, wishing the joy of its contents—mostly traveling supplies—to the beggar who finds it. I empty the tin along the wall, crushing the biscuits with my foot.

The dockworkers push the car in place, and the crewman waves his arms. “Stop. Set the brake! Lash it now. Smartly!”

*Come on, biscuits, work your buttery charms soon.*

The men work quickly, lashing the wheels to the platform.

Of course, when you need a rat, there is none to be found.

Panic jabs at my heart. I abandon my post, searching the dark corners of the quay for the loathsome creatures. After several minutes of scurrying around, I spot a couple of rats feasting on a sausage—at least I hope it’s a sausage. Something sour rises in my throat. I’ve done more repulsive things, but for the life of me, I can’t think of one of them.

Slowly, I lower myself, flexing my fingers. Before any more doubts seep in, I snatch a fat one by its scruff. “Got you.”

It wiggles and hisses, red eyes glaring, probably oozing poison and disease. Grimly, I hang on, my lips peeled back in disgust. I hurry back toward the hoisting platform, casing the dock for a mark. I’ll have to find someone with an open purse or a large pocket. A woman with pin curls stares open-mouthed at the foremast staking the ship’s bow, the hood of her old-fashioned cloak pulled back from her short neck.

*Forgive me, ma'am, for what I'm about to do, and know that it is for a good cause.*

I duck behind a bunch of men with long beards and burgundy caps heading her way. My rat jerks in my grasp. With light steps, I sneak up to the woman, and while saying a prayer, I release the rat into her open hood.

In four strides, I return to the platform, which has already started to rise.

"Stand back, folks." The crewman walks the perimeter of the platform, enforcing a two-yard margin. If my rat doesn't do his ratty thing soon, it will rise too high for me to scale.

The woman doesn't scream. Have I chosen that one-in-a-million mark who isn't scared by a rat down her back? Should I take a chance and climb on anyway, hoping to God that everyone blinks at the same time?

A scream that could separate the soul from one's body tears through the crowd.

At last!

The crewman glances toward the woman and the commotion forming around her.

I rush forward and hook my hands over the edge of the platform, which has lifted to waist level. I haul myself onto it from the side closest to the water and scoop up my skirts, praying my added weight won't topple the whole thing. I imagine myself light as a bird, the way I do when we walk the rope.

I flatten myself and roll under the car. But something is wrong. Something has caught me. My jacket! The back of my



sleeve has snagged on a nail. With a sharp yank of my shoulder, I flip myself over, hearing the fabric rip. Then I scoot under the car, trying my best to melt into the rough wood.

The platform sways, and seagulls caw as they fly by. I heave in air. The scents of motor oil and my own fear fill my nose. At any moment, I expect the platform to stop. I listen for exclamations, or constables blowing whistles.

But the platform continues its ascent. So far, no one is yelling, except for the unfortunate victim. God save her from the plague. I press my cheek to the wood. From what I can see, no one is looking at me.

Then I see her. A child around five years old with stringy yellow hair and eyes as wide as planets is pointing at me.

*I'm just an illusion, kid. Forget what you saw.*

The steady pull of the crane snatches her from my view. New worries flood my mind as the platform swings over the *Titanic's* well deck, ready for its descent into the cargo hatch. What if the shaft to the *Titanic's* belly does not feature a wall ladder on which I can escape? I'll need to exit before reaching the storage area in the bowels of the ship, where surely men will be waiting to unload the car.

The platform slows as it nears the hatch, and my stomach turns loops. Glimpsing a crewman, I shrink back. He could see me if he thought to look under the car.

His face glistens with sweat and wonder as he walks the length of the platform, taking in the vehicle. "She's a looker. The French know how to make 'em. Thirty-five miles an hour—can you believe it?"

I close my eyes and hold my breath, as if that could hide me from view. Even my blood stops pumping.

He completes his circuit. “Bring her down.”

The grinding of a motor and the clink of chain unspooling herald my descent into the jaws of destiny. Sounds echo off the shaft closing around me, and the light changes.

Rolling out from under the car, I scramble to the edge of the platform and look wildly around for a ladder. It’s on the *other* side. My wet fingers slip against the glossy car frame as I swing myself into the seat and scoot across. To my horror, before I can grab a rung, the wall ends.

The platform descends at a walking pace past a room with benches and tables filled with passengers—third class, by the looks of them. Some stare at me dropping from the ceiling, still clinging to the car seat. Nearby, a uniformed crewman chats with a woman, his back to me. Can’t get off here. I hold my breath and wait for the platform to pass from view.

At the next level, the shaft becomes enclosed once again. I step up onto the seat, then grab the center chain. Clenching my boots around the chain, I use my legs to propel myself up, trying to climb faster than my stage is falling. The crane brakes, giving me a few precious seconds to scale higher, the chain digging into my hands. Then on it goes, rumbling to life again. I inch up, cursing my skirt for impeding my progress. Sweat blinds me. My limbs scream in anguish. I pass the large room. If anyone notices me, no one protests.

At last, the ladder appears and I hoist myself high enough

to place my foot on a rung. Grabbing the ladder, my skirt tears, but at least I'm no longer headed down. I rest, catching my breath.

Then I climb, rung by rung, until sunlight kisses my face.

I peek over the framed opening. Forty feet away by the base of the crane, the sweaty crewman who had admired the Renault has pulled back his navy beret and is looking up at a seagull. No one else is on the well deck. I imagine myself as invisible as the breeze, then hook a leg over the edge. As quietly as possible, I roll onto the pine deck.

With a loud caw, the seagull swoops in my direction, and the crewman wheels about.

*Sod off, you screechy tattletale.*

The crewman places a hand on the crane base to steady himself, then draws closer, his bloodshot eyes nearly pouring from their sockets. "Wh-where did you come from?"

I scramble to my feet, feeling a breeze through the tear in my skirt. The sleeve of my jacket collects around my elbow. I must look a fright.

Behind the crewman, the superstructure stacks up like the layers of a cake, at the top of which stands a man with a white beard and a proud bearing, the gold braids on his navy sleeves gleaming like bracelets. Even from fifty feet away, I recognize the face in all the brochures: Captain Smith, the king of this floating palace. He spreads his fingers against the rail and bends his gaze in our direction.

I squeeze a toe down on my panic, which, like a tissue-thin handkerchief in a strong wind, is in danger of cutting loose.

The crewman's nostrils put me in mind of the double barrel of a gun. "I said, where did you come from?"

As the Chinese proverb goes, the hand that strikes also blocks. Straightening my hat, I put on the haughty look Mrs. Sloane used with inferiors, eyes hooded, nose tipped up like a seal's. After months of assisting the tough old nut, I could do Mrs. Sloane better than she could. "My mother's loins. And you?"

Someone utters a short laugh. Behind me, leaning against a staircase up to the forecabin, I recognize the slender American woman from the first-class gangway. A fresh cigarette dangles from her red mouth.

The crewman's eyes narrow into slits. He points a thick finger at the cargo shaft. "No. I saw you come from the hatch. Else why's your jacket torn like that?"

"Are you suggesting *I* climbed out from *there*?" I snort loudly. "I can't even walk on this slippery deck without falling. Look, I have ripped my jacket." I crook a finger at his bulbous nose. "You're lucky I didn't break my neck."

Lookouts stationed in the "crow's nest" halfway up the foremast peer down at us. I half expect them to start clanging the warning bell from their washtub-like perch. But then an officer emerges from a doorway under the forecabin, his boots jabbing the deck, and I forget all about the lookouts.

A noose of a tie hangs from a severe white collar, and a jury of eight brass buttons judge me from a humorless field of navy. A uniform like that could have me thrown off this boat for a final baptism. "Something the matter here?"

The crewman mops some of the sweat off his face with his sleeve. "Officer Merry. She climbed out of the hatch."

Officer Merry folds a clipboard into his chest and glares at me. Shapeless eyebrows overhang a dour expression, perhaps caused by the pressure of living up to a name like Merry.

With my hand to my chest, I laugh, but in my nervousness, it sounds more like the honk of passing geese. "Of course I did. Right after I dropped in from my flying balloon."

"Who are you?" asks the officer.

He will ask for papers. The ruse is up. My leg shakes, but I clamp down on it, forcing it into stillness.

"Should I call the Master-at-Arms?" asks the crewman.

"For goodness' sake, I saw the whole thing." The American with the cigarette sashays up from behind me, her suit as fitted as if it were sewn around her. I'd nearly forgotten about her. "She was just taking some air, same as me, and the poor thing stumbled but caught herself on the lip of that hatch. Lucky for you, she has good reflexes. An accident right before launch could hardly be good press."

I try not to gape at her.

"Miss Hart. How nice to see you." Officer Merry affects an air of pleasant surprise, which is as effective as trying to spruce up a plate of spoiled meat with a sprig of parsley.

Miss Hart begins pacing, moving as regally as the queen's cat. "I must say, the layout of this ship is quite confusing. It's a wonder you don't have more people falling into the hatch. Obviously, you didn't get a woman's opinion on the design."

Officer Merry stares, caught in the fluttering trap of her

glamorous eyelashes. He clears his throat. "It was designed this way so that honored passengers such as yourself could enjoy their luxurious facilities without being disturbed." He glances up at the navigating bridge and, noticing Captain Smith, throws him a quick salute. The Captain nods and turns away. "We would not want people to get confused about where they should be."

"So your answer is to confuse them further if they stray," she says brightly. "Interesting."

"You should be relaxing on the Promenade Deck, not down here with the third class. They are serving champagne. It's a good time to meet your fellow passengers. We have several notable guests traveling with us."

My ears get bigger. I learned from Mrs. Sloane's list of "distinguished passengers" that Mr. Albert Ankeny Stewart, part owner of the Ringling Brothers Circus, would be among those guests. When I received Jamie's letter, announcing that his crew was being transferred via the *Titanic*, I knew it was a sign that it was time for me to finally get our family back together. We'd dreamed of going "big-time" in a real circus ever since Ba showed us a poster of P. T. Barnum and Co.'s Greatest Show on Earth. We'd even choreographed an audition routine that we called the Jumbo, after the great circus elephant. Somehow, I aim to show Mr. Stewart that routine.

"Mother doesn't care for my smoking," Miss Hart taps her finger against her cigarette holder, and ashes drop. "But I am ready to return to my luxurious facilities. I trust you know a more direct route back to B-Deck." She takes his arm,

nodding toward a small staircase that leads to the superstructure. I can't help wondering if she actually does know her way around.

"Pull the gangway," barks a voice from somewhere in the distance, lighting a fire in me. I make a hasty exit toward the forecastle.

At last, it's anchors aweigh.

Officer Merry's gaze follows me, heavy as a boot on my back.



Descending a wide staircase under the forecastle, I find myself in the large room I passed while in the cargo shaft. Bright light from the open staircase gives the space an airy feel.

By the grace of God, I've landed on this stepping-stone, bringing me one step closer to America's shores. But before I search for Jamie, I need the grace of the lavatory. My bladder feels like a dozen butchers are whacking it with meat pounders.

I remove my ridiculous jacket and glance about for somewhere to do my business.

The words "General Room" are marked in gold letters on the wall. Seems they could've come up with a more interesting name. *Obviously, you didn't get a woman's opinion*, I hear Miss Hart say in her mocking tone.

I try to recall the ship's layout from the diagrams Mrs. Sloane requested so that she would be comfortable enough to make the journey. We reviewed them extensively, but it's hard to think when parts of you are under pressure.

Below the Boat Deck—the uppermost deck, where they keep the lifeboats—the decks descend from A to G, and for



the most part, correlate to class, like how wool is rated for quality. This General Room, a gathering spot for the third class, lies in the forward part of the ship, on D-Deck.

No lavatory presents itself, so I hobble down another floor to E-Deck.

The stairway spills onto a wide corridor that runs from port to starboard, such that if the *Titanic* was a fish, this corridor would be the collar, the choicest piece to eat. I dub it the Collar, and I imagine Miss Hart would approve of the moniker, which is both memorable and practical.

Stewards in high-necked white jackets with gold buttons mill about the area, directing passengers to their destinations.

The sign for the lavatory is like a port in a storm, and I gladly take refuge within it.

Sinks face off against seven water closets, each with a dial near the handle, all marked “vacant.” I throw my jacket onto the nearest hook and quickly smite my hands of any rat chiggers with a cake of soap imprinted with the White Star logo.

When I swing shut the door of the first water closet, an electric light flickers on. Even the third-class bathrooms here have class. Once I am blissfully empty, I lift a back lever, and the toilet neatly accepts my deposit. I wash up again, this time enjoying the cedar scent of the soap.

Now to find Jamie. If I ask one of the stewards for help, will they ask to see my papers? I’ve already made an unfavorable impression on those who needed impressing.

My ruined jacket hangs like a dead badger. I unpin the beehive lace and hold it to my face. The black dots that give the

lace its name certainly obscure my Chinese features. I could be anyone under this veil—the queen, even. Perhaps it will give me easier passage here.

I remove my hat and pin the lace to the band so that it overhangs my face to my shoulders. It's a fashionable curtain, of the sort wealthy women in mourning might wear. As for the rip in my skirt, I twist the garment around so that the tear hangs to one side and won't vent when I walk.

Back in the Collar, I case the area for a steward. Folks—mostly men—bustle around, carrying suitcases, looking for rooms.

From the ship diagrams, I recall that third-class cabins run along the port side on this level, with first- and second-class rooms on the starboard side. Mrs. Sloane didn't want to stay on this deck, or D-Deck above it, because of how the classes cohabit, even though the ship is designed so that upper and lower class will never meet. If she was going to ride an elephant, it would be at the highest end, not the rump.

"Only men here at this end for your protection," a steward tells a young woman with a straw hat. No wonder the lavatory was empty. "It's against the rules for men and women to visit each other's rooms. But you'll like your cabin at the stern. It's steadier back there, and closer to the poop deck, where the third class can take fresh air. Just follow Scotland Road." He points down a corridor that runs the length of the ship like the backbone of a fish. "Smartest way to get from bow to stern. You'll pass a slew of crew cabins, but keep going to the end."

If the single men are in the bow, I am close. "Excuse me, sir?"

The steward's eyes widen at the sight of me in my veil. "Yes, ma'am?"

"I'm looking for James Luck. Could you tell me which room he's in?"

"Let's see . . ." He runs a finger down his clipboard. "E-16. With the company of Atlantic Steam. Just around the corner." He opens a hand toward the port side. "But as I told the other lady, only men are allowed in the bow. I can leave a message for you, if you give me your name."

"Er, no, that's okay. I will find him later. Thank you, steward."

He bows, and I wait for him to leave. But the man stands his ground, as if waiting for *me* to leave. Before he gets suspicious, I duck back into the lavatory to wait him out.

Lifting off my hat, I smooth loose tendrils of hair back into my braided bun. My pounding heart flutters against my embroidered linen blouse.

I imagine how Jamie will take the news. He may play things casual, but I'll throw my arms around him and squeeze the casual out. But what if he's different now? Too old for my clowning around. What if the years have given him a vulture neck and a map's worth of lines on his face, and he rants at the world and spits when he talks?

Perhaps I should've warned him I was coming. But would the *Titanic* receive a telegram on a third-class passenger's behalf?

I replace my hat and arrange my veil. It's a good disguise. Maybe good enough to sneak into first class and discover the whereabouts of Mrs. Sloane's trunk.

After two minutes pass, I poke my head out again. A couple of kids running down the hall stop and stare at me. I shut the door again, waiting for their delighted shrieking to fade, then venture out. I quickly make tracks toward a small companionway on the port side. Room E-16 lies only a few paces down.

My heartbeat knocks double time as I rap twice on the door.

No one answers, but the men on the other side are speaking in Cantonese. Though the sound is harsh to Western ears, it reminds me of Ba's optimistic voice, and I feel my heart swell. I put my ear to the wood.

"Don't answer it, Tao," someone grumbles. "It's probably that skeleton steward again. Ming Lai already told him we're not interested in their 'sweepstakes.'" He says that last word in barely recognizable English.

"Maybe he is here to fill the water pitcher," says an airier voice, which must belong to Tao.

"Drummer already went to fill the pitcher. Sit down, old fool, and finish your meditation."

"How can one meditate with you breathing so loud?"

I knock again, and say in Cantonese, "Hello? I'm looking for Mr. James Luck."

The voices abruptly stop. The door opens, and a man with a braided beard that drips from his chin like an icicle tilts his

thin face at me. A queue, like a grown-up version of the beard, hangs down his back. The front portion of his scalp is shaved clean. Chinese men wear this hairstyle to show fealty to the Qing dynasty, though since the Qing dynasty has fallen, some have cut it off.

The man's curious expression makes him look youthful, despite his many white hairs. "Who are you?" He must be Tao, judging from his airy voice.

"I am Jamie's sister, Valora Luck, Uncle," I say, using the respectful term the Chinese use for elders. "Is he staying here?"

I peer inside and see two sets of bunk beds. Four seabags hang on hooks, each embroidered with a different Chinese surname. To my dismay, none belong to Jamie. I'd stitched his myself from sturdy denim.

The second man holds the post of one of the bunk beds, peering at me through hooded eyes. Under his seaman's cap, his hair hangs oily and black around his round face, which is creased with discontent.

One is like water, and the other like smoke. They're probably in their fifties, though they look more like they're in their sixties.

Favoring his left foot, the grumpy man limps forward, blocking the bright light from the porthole as well as the cool ocean breeze. A top incisor tooth swings out a tad too far, like a single fang, and the knees of his sea slops are worn and patched. "Jamie never said he had a sister."

I cough in disbelief. "Well, he does. We're twins."

The sound of people cheering from the docks below mimics

the pounding of my own heart. So these men do know Jamie. I am close.

Tao tugs at his whale-blue kerchief, embroidered with the letters ASC. Atlantic Steam Company. Grumpy also wears the kerchief.

I lift my veil, and Tao's honest face takes on the look of one sighting a rare bird. He points with a finger that is missing its tip, and I try not to stare. "Same narrow ears as Jamie."

"Narrow ears doesn't mean they are related." Grumpy bats Tao's shoulder. "Why is she here? She probably wants money. Women always want money."

"She is wearing nice clothes. Why would she need money?"

"To buy more nice clothes, of course! She looks shifty. Women cannot be trusted." Grumpy pushes Tao aside and grabs the doorknob. A whiff of tobacco makes me wince.

"But I have traveled a long way to see him. Please, is he on this boat? Where can I find him?"

"He is not here." Grumpy closes the door in my face.

"You almost hit her, Fong," Tao protests. "Negative energy will return to you."

The lock snickers closed.

A heavy stone of dread sinks in me. "He is not *here* here, or he is not on this boat?" No one answers. "Please, uncles, if you do see him, could you tell him his sister is looking for him?"

Tao begins to speak, but Fong cuts him off with a hacking sound. "Don't talk! You just encourage her to stay longer."

My face burns under my veil. Fong mentioned two other men—Ming Lai and someone named Drummer. Has one of

them substituted for Jamie? If Jamie isn't on the *Titanic*, then I am in for one long ride.

Three stout notes, blown from somewhere above, form a chord that rumbles through my body. The floor begins to move as the ship sets sail. The trumpets that herald us out to sea remain in my ear, sounding more like the howl of the hounds when the fox slips through their grasp.



Chin up. I cannot despair until I have checked every corner of this ship. I shall start with the poop deck, where the third class air themselves. Perhaps Jamie is watching the ship depart.

I slog down Scotland Road—the spine of the fish—a brightly lit and bustling hall of slatted wood. The white enamel walls ring with a mishmash of languages, making my head hurt. I stop at a drinking fountain, and its cool offering is a tender mercy. Then I continue, nearly tripping on the raised sill of a doorway marked “watertight.”

On my left, the humming walls bear signs that read “Boiler Casing”—from 6 to 1—and feel warm to the touch. Those must extend to the boiler rooms on the bottom deck, where the firemen feed the furnaces.

On my right, crew dormitories are arranged by pecking order—beginning with stewards by class, then engineers, cooks, dishwashers, and potato peelers. Then the dorms give way to passenger cabins. Doors open and shut, offering glimpses of families settling into serviceable rooms with tidy bunks, even a few with sinks and mirrors. The furnishings are



nicer than one would expect in third class and fit perfectly in the cozy spaces. Everything belongs somewhere.

Except me.

I slow, watching two kids jump off a top bunk. Their mum whips around and pinches them by the ears. “Jump off again, and I’ll have them lock you in the brig.”

After what feels like miles, I reach the last staircase and follow the crowds toward the scent of the ocean.

Two decks up, people move in and out of the public rooms like bees to a hive. One, the Smoking Room, emits a pungent blue haze. The other, a second General Room, vibrates with the sound of a banjo player. No Jamie in either.

The ocean air blows its breath onto my face when I step out onto the aft well deck, which, together with the one at the bow, bookends the superstructure. I climb a final staircase to the rearmost deck, the ingloriously named poop deck. There again, a woman’s opinion would’ve been helpful, as one cannot help but think of the toilet every time one refers to it.

I draw a horseshoe-shaped path around the deck. Folks bundled in their plain wool coats and thick sweaters step aside at my approach. Some men even tip their hats to me. It seems wearing a veil does improve how I’m treated.

A raised catwalk called the docking bridge spans the width of the deck, on which a crewman mans a steering wheel. When I explained to Mrs. Sloane that they steered from the docking bridge when the *Titanic* had to go backward, she declared

herself sold. If a big boat like the *Titanic* could go backward, it was safe enough for her.

The crewman at the wheel spots me, and his short forehead crimps under a beret straight enough to cut timber.

I stop breathing. Has he seen through my veil? Or will he chase me away for being on the wrong deck?

But then he acknowledges me with a touch of his hat and begins polishing his brass instruments with quick movements of his short limbs.

Behind us, Southampton has shrunk to fit in a doll's house, chasing a thrill up my spine. I wipe the sea mist from the railing on my skirt.

Farewell, England. Farewell, *land*.

A thread of fear tickles my back. This is my first time on a boat. Suddenly, the idea of trusting a box of steel to float thousands of miles across water seems as ludicrous as flying by balloon. But people do this every day, don't they? Besides, I am on the newest—and therefore, safest—ship on the Atlantic. And I have more important things to worry about right now, like finding Jamie.

I lower myself onto one of the benches arranged bow to stern and try to come up with a new plan.

"They charge a shilling if you want a room key," says a woman on the bench behind me. "That's banditry."

"We don't need a key," replies the man beside her. "What do we have worth stealing?"

"My mother's Spanish hairnet."

"As I said."

If they charge for keys, I could try every unlocked door until I found Jamie. Though I might not get very far before I was branded a deviant and thrown in the brig, if there really is one.

I twist to my left, glancing across the well deck toward the top of the superstructure and the lifeboats that rim the perimeter of the Boat Deck. If all else fails, I could sleep in one of those. Of course, I would need to grow a layer of blubber to protect me from the freezing nights. The Atlantic will be as cold as snowmelt, maybe even colder, once we reach the ice fields off Newfoundland.

My shoulders have pulled toward my ears, and I roll them back.

Below the Boat Deck on A-Deck, women in the latest seashell pastels and men in suits as slick and oiled as seals collect around a quartet of musicians. The view is less grand one level down on B-Deck, where the second class mingles. My mind skims to the bottom levels where the “black” gangs work, so called because of the color the coal turns them.

Ten decks in all, home to two thousand passengers.

*Jamie, will I ever find you?*

I sniff, on the verge of falling into the pity pit.

“This time, no cheating, Wink,” says a voice with an accent like Ba’s.

My breath catches. On the bench behind me, two Chinese lads and a young man with a deep scowl have replaced the couple and are playing a card game. The speaker sits in the middle with his cards held close to his nose. I guess he’s around

eleven or twelve years old. He has the shape of a matchstick, which is how Jamie looked at that age, with a big head and narrow everything else.

“I never cheat,” the lad closest to me growls in the highly offended manner of someone who *does* cheat. He glances back at me. I put him at around nine or ten, and in danger of drowning in his clothes. A too-big cap droops to one side of his head, and his kerchief is so tattered, it’s more like a tag around his neck. His delicate cheeks twitch in a way that makes his eye wink, probably the source of his name.

The scowling man, who looks about the same age as Jamie and me, stretches an arm taut as a bridge cable along the back of the bench. His ring catches my eye. It seems to be made from thick shell and etched with a circular design. I’ve seen the scrimshaw sailors scratch on whale teeth and bones, but never on a shell.

“We could get jobs showing people how to play Winds of Change,” says the matchstick lad, his voice not quite that of a man but no longer that of a boy either.

My spine stiffens. Jamie made up that game. He loved cards, though after he’d lost our grocery allowance on High Card, he swore off gambling for money forever.

The scowling man snorts. “Your only job here is to stay out of trouble.” Now, that is a man’s voice. It’s not heavy on the bass notes, but it exudes a quiet authority. Unlike the lads with their easy tongues, he speaks his English carefully, like a cat choosing where to put his paws on a slippery rail.

“But why do you and Jamie get to find jobs?” asks the matchstick lad.

I bolt up in my seat at the mention of Jamie’s name.

“We are older, and White Star does not hire children.”

“No, it’s because you and Jamie bet the washing over who can make more money, and you don’t want us to get in the way,” says Wink in his growly voice, which is so at odds with his petite self.

“That, too.”

A bet. That sounds just like Jamie, who was always challenging me. We did it all: contests to see who could hold their breath the longest, who could balance an egg on their forehead the longest, who could fit the most biscuits in their mouth.

Wink plucks a card from his hand. “Winds of Change.”

“You can’t call Winds of Change until an eight has been played,” the matchstick lad objects.

The scowling man’s gaze wanders to me and loiters, probably trying to see through my veil. The noble angle of his jaw challenges me to run a finger across it, like one might test the edge of a knife for quality. But then his eyes drift away, as if deciding I am not that interesting.

“Bo, Olly’s making up rules,” Wink complains.

“If you kumquats do not stop arguing, we play Old Maid.”

“I’m afraid he’s right. An eight must be played first,” I hear myself say. If these are Jamie’s mates, surely he is close by, though I don’t see any other Chinese around.

“See?” says Olly, before joining Wink and the scowling

man, Bo, in staring at me. I scoot back to the armrest, so all three are in view and no one is tempted to peek behind my veil.

“How does she know Winds of Change?” asks Wink, switching to Cantonese, which they naturally assume I cannot understand. His delicate cheek begins to twitch.

“Maybe Jamie lied about making it up,” says Olly.

“Jamie wouldn’t lie, you cow’s butt.”

Olly ignores the insult. “Why do you think she’s wearing a veil?”

Wink’s eyes grow large. “Maybe she has warts.”

“Or maybe she doesn’t have a face.”

Bo turns forward with a snort, the ridges of his back flexing visibly even under his peacoat. “Maybe you should both shut up. She’s first class. Too good for you to speak to.”

“If she’s first class, why is she on this deck?”

“Because first class can walk where they want. Stop looking at her.”

The two lads continued gaping.

“I don’t have warts, and if I didn’t have a face, then how could I be looking at your funny mugs?” I say evenly in Cantonese.

Olly’s jaw drops, exposing rows of crooked teeth. Wink slaps a hand over his mouth, as if to hide the state of his cutters. Bo quirks an eyebrow, and I revel in the small triumph of getting a reaction from him.

“I’m looking for James Luck. Know where I can find him?”

They hesitate, and I’m reminded of the two men like water

and smoke, Tao and Fong. I've heard that sailors are superstitious, but I had no idea they were so distrustful.

Bo's eyes drift to the well deck, where a crowd has gathered. He stretches up as if to see something, then nods toward the people. "Start there."

I cover the two paces to the railing and crane my neck. The crowd parts to reveal the back of a young man dressed in sea slops, kneeling as he pets a dog. Is it . . . Jamie?

He removes his cap and smooths his hair, a gesture I've seen a thousand times. It *is* Jamie, though he's broader in the back than I remember. My heart squeezes, and all the nerves kinked up inside me seem to shake loose. *At last.*

Olly blows out a thin whistle from where he, Wink, and Bo have joined me at the rail. "That's a poodle, the kind of dog you have to *pay* for."

"Jamie's always been good with dogs," I say, remembering how the neighborhood mutts would follow him around.

"I do not think it is the dog that interests him," Bo says cheekily.

"What do you mean by that?"

"See for yourself."

A young lady leans over and attaches a leash to the dog, spilling her minky hair into her face. Guess I'm not the only first-class lady slumming it with the poor. She's not dressed as flashy as the other nobs—a cheerful suit in butter yellow and pearl earbobs—but she has the kind of pretty face, with soft brown eyes and strawberry-pink lips, that causes men

to drop their jaws and women to drop their stitches. Jamie says something, and her patrician nose crinkles becomingly. They're . . . conversing?

Olly stretches far over the rail. "Who's she?"

Bo pulls Olly back by his collar. "White ghost means trouble. Jamie should avoid her."

The Chinese can be suspicious of foreigners, who rarely do them any favors.

"She's a fetcher," says Wink, who then steals another glance at me. "I bet she smells like marmalade."

Olly breaks free from Bo. "And butter."

"Why would you think that?" I ask.

"Jamie said those are the best smells."

Clearly, they know him well. Mum made us biscuits with marmalade and butter whenever we had money to spare, which wasn't often.

Jamie climbs the stairs, not as spryly as I remember, but rather as if each step requires a separate thought. I marvel at how he has filled out his wrapper. New muscles mean better acts, faster moves. Acrobatics came naturally to him, unlike myself. I always had to work twice as hard, especially after I started rounding out. Though he isn't tall by English standards, five eight at most, there is a brightness around Jamie that commands attention, even from first-class girls with poodles.

He bounds over to us, a high flush on his golden cheeks. He nods at me. "Ma'am."

I almost laugh out loud, but suck it back in. The first class does not waste their breath responding to commoners.



“Make a new friend?” Bo asks him.

Jamie gives his coat lapels a sharp tug. “Miss Charlotte Fine of New York City.”

Miss *Fine*? I snort hard enough for my veil to ripple. Jamie glances at me, but Charlotte waves a pretty gloved hand at him, then makes her poodle wave its black paw. Jamie returns the wave.

“Her poodle slid off the deck during that one dip, but I caught her. She sure is clever. She can beg and play dead and everything.”

This time, I can’t hold back. “The girl or the dog?”

Jamie’s eyes—narrower than mine but a richer brown, like Mum’s—snap to me. He stares hard at my veil, but unlike the others, he knows the face on the other side. Knows its heart shape as well as his own, with our same tendency to stick up our chins as if perpetually checking for rain.

His mouth splits into a half grin, half grimace. “I don’t bloody believe it.”

I raise my veil long enough for him and his crew to get a peek. “Believe it, Jamie, because here I am.”



**T**hough I cannot afford to attract more attention than I already have, I embrace my brother. The familiar scent of milk biscuits and trampled ryegrass, now dusted with coal, puts a lump in my throat. “How about you? Shoveling coal shored you up.” I give his solid shoulder a thump.

Despite his new density, his face is still youthful with fine bones and cheeks you can cup your hands around. He looks like a pretty boy, and I like a boyish girl. “They said you were in E-16, but someone named Fong shut the door in my face, and I thought you didn’t make it after all, and you have no idea—” It’s hard to string words together when you’re trying not to blubber.

“Sorry about that. Fong’s a suspicious old boot. We exchanged rooms because he didn’t want Room 14.”

The Chinese avoid the number four, which sounds like the word for “death” in Cantonese.

“What are you doing here, Val? And why are you dressed like that?”

“It’s a bit of a story.”

His mates stand by, sporting various states of confusion. Olly stares openly, his eyes flitting to the short fan of feath-

ers on my hat, which somehow survived my perilous journey aboard. Wink places a thin hand on the back of the bench and lifts himself up onto his toes, as if to get a better bead on me, his expressive eyes jittery. Bo leans his sturdy frame against the rail, chewing his lower lip. With or without his scowl, he charms the vision, his dark brows standing out against clear skin, his guarded eyes the color of oolong tea steeped to just the right smokiness.

“Jamie, how come you never told us you had a sweetheart?” Olly blurts.

I let go of my brother with a loud guffaw. Jamie slaps my back harder than he needs to. “Everyone, this is Valora. My twin *sister*. So no one get any ideas, because she’s off limits.”

Wink and Olly snicker, proof that they are not the ones Jamie is worried about. Bo glares up at the docking bridge, as if he can’t be bothered to look at me anyway.

Olly ties his thin arms into a knot. “Why didn’t you ever tell us you had a twin?”

“Does no one know about me?” Well, that is a knife to the gut. I tie my own arms together.

“You never told us you were rich, either.” Wink reaches out a finger and touches a bit of lace on my sleeve.

Jamie slaps his hand away. “We call this one Wink. He blinks a lot, but nothing gets past him.”

Wink puffs up his bony chest and lifts his nose.

“And this eager fellow is Oliver. When I first met him, he didn’t have two words to rub together, and now we can’t shut him up.” Jamie pushes the lad away by his bony forehead.

“They’re our boiler monkeys, sweeping up coal, fetching water. But mostly they just get underfoot.”

The lads protest, but Bo razzes them on the head.

I’d imagined the men of Jamie’s company would be, well, *men*, grizzled and hard-boiled, like Fong. Certainly not this young. Jamie rarely mentioned his mates in his letters. Yet, as I watch them horse around, I can’t help thinking that these lads are more than mates. They’re behaving like brothers. Why keep them a secret from me, and me a secret from them? I am not only his twin, but also his best friend. At least, I was.

“This classy gent is Chow Bo Wah.” Jamie claps Bo on the back. “He’s a fireman like me, but he shovels coal twice as fast. The muscles are all an act, though. Inside, he’s a kitten.”

Bo scowls. “You are a fool.”

Jamie laughs. “Now out with it. Why are you here and not with the Sloanes?”

I muster a smile, despite Jamie having sidestepped *my* question. I will beat it out of him later. “Mrs. Sloane died, and her son and his wife went to Scotland to tour her ashes.”

“Why didn’t they take you with them?”

“They wanted to, but . . .” My mind flies back to when Mrs. Sloane’s daughter-in-law launched a potted fern at me after I gave her my notice. Never mind that my main duty was to watch Mrs. Sloane and she no longer needed watching. I never told Jamie of the abuse I suffered there.

“But?” He cocks an ear toward me, as if trying to make my response come faster.

“But I quit. They didn’t need me anymore. See, I read your

letter about your leaving on the *Titanic*, and with Mrs. Sloane departing and you departing, it all made sense.”

“What?” He shakes his head as if clearing his ears of water, and his eyes take on the grippy look he gets when he thinks I’ve swiped one of his biscuits. “What made sense?”

“That it was time for us to go to New York together.”

He wheezes out a laugh. “I can’t go to New York. They’re expecting all of us in Cuba, and I can’t stop for a jaunt.”

“I didn’t mean a jaunt.” I ignore the disbelief trampling his face. “Remember how Ba called America the beautiful country, where the air is always blue and fruit trees grow like weeds? And now here we are, going there together. You can’t tell me you’d rather spend your time”—remembering his mates, I lower my voice—“shoveling coal than making our way in New York.”

“Shoveling coal is hard work, good work. It’s good for me.”

“So we’ll find you some good hard work in America, something that won’t have you sticking your head in an oven every day.”

“We don’t stick our heads in the boilers.”

“Then why are you getting a vulture neck?”

He straightens his posture.

“You want to end up like those men in E-16, crabby and missing fingers?”

Bo nearly smiles. He pushes himself off the rail. “Hey, kumquats, let’s see the propeller.” Catching the reluctant Olly and Wink by their arms, he hauls them away.

We watch the lads stop in front of a couple of young men

with plaid jackets tossing a strange oval ball. Back and forth it flies. Olly says something, and one of the plaid jackets shakes his head and grips his ball tighter. Bo pushes them along, taking one last glance at me.

Jamie sinks onto the bench and holds his head between his hands. "America doesn't want us. They passed a law to keep the Chinese out."

"But we're not from China. We're British. We write our letters better than our characters."

"British subjects, not citizens. England's only happy to be rid of us."

I carefully smooth my skirts before sliding in beside him. "If everything goes according to my plan, New York will be rolling out the red carpet for us."

His eyes narrow. "What are you on about?"

"I happen to know that Mr. Albert Ankeny Stewart, part owner of the Ringling Brothers Circus, is a first-class passenger here on the *Titanic*."

"Stop there."

But the barrel has already started rolling. "If we could impress Mr. Stewart, he could hire us as employees of his circus. Surely America would make an exception for an influential man like him. We've been talking about this since forever. Virtue and Valor, the Chinese acrobats. Come on, Jamie, you can't tell me you don't miss it. This is our chance!"

Before he contradicts me, I sweep ahead, the barrel picking up speed. "We can do the Jumbo routine and make sure he sees it. It'll be just like in St. James's Park. They loved us there."

St. James's Park was our stage of choice, with its wide expanses of green and constant stream of people. We'd make enough in one day to keep us fed for a week in the summer months.

"They didn't always love us. Sometimes they called us pinch-eyed mongrels." He twists his tricky wrist—the left one, which sometimes gets stuck in one position.

"Sticks and stones."

"Yeah. They threw those at us, too."

I watch the oval ball spiral in tight arcs from one plaid jacket to the other. A memory trickles in: a couple of college men, dressed in dark blazers and the distinctive red, white, and blue neckties that marked them as Cambridge scholars. I had just climbed up Jamie's shoulders, in preparation for our four-hand six-egg juggle act. One of the Cambridge men jerked his chin at us. "It's a damn shame, all the litter filling our fine parks nowadays." He reached down to adjust his sock. Or so I thought. The next moment, a pinecone hit me in the collarbone. I fell, rolling like Ba had taught us to let the ground absorb the impact. Jamie was so angry, he threw all the eggs at the blighters. After the coppers arrested *us* instead of the Cambridge pair, Ba had to pawn his silver belt buckle to get us off the hook.

I bump my knee against Jamie's. "Let that go. We're here now, no worse for wear, and we have our future to think about. Family has to stick together, Jamie. That's you and me."

He sighs. "How did you get here?"

"By train."

“You know what I mean. Tickets aren’t cheap, and neither are those togs.” His eyes travel down my linen shirt to the silk jacket in my lap.

“Mrs. Sloane bought the tickets. She’d been wanting to visit her brother in America, but she hates—*hated*—sea travel. Then she heard about the new ship and decided it wasn’t going to get better than the *Titanic*.”

“How did they let you board without her?”

“They didn’t.”

He grits his teeth. “Keep going.”

“I snuck in.”

“Bloody snakes. You *snuck* in? Explain,” he growls.

I summarize my ride up to the cargo hatch. His spine seems to contract with my telling, as if each statement is a hammer blow, driving the nail further into the bench. By the time I get to the part about my rescue by Miss Hart, he is back to holding his head in his hands.

“Have you got straw in your attic?” he huffs, finally straightening again. “They’ll figure it out. Then they’ll send you back, either in Cherbourg or Queenstown, probably in some fish hauler with a bunch of smelly old sods.”

“Cherbourg’s in a few hours,” I say of the French port where the *Titanic* will be taking on additional passengers. “The crew will be too busy to figure it out before then. And Queenstown isn’t until tomorrow morning.” The last stop before open sea. “I’ll keep my chin tucked until then.”

“You’ll have to keep it tucked longer than that. Bollocks,



what are we going to do?" He whacks his cap against his knee. "This is so typical. Plans always half-baked."

"So I've had to improvise."

"You wouldn't have had to improvise if you had thought things through. You can't just"—he throws out his hands—"waltz into first class without your mistress. They'll catch you eventually."

I primly smooth my skirts. "Aren't you a nelly naysayer?"

"Better than a Jack the lad," he shoots back, calling me a show-off.

"Simple Simon."

He twists away from me and pounds a fist to his mouth. Clearly the naming game is not filling his nose with the perfume of brotherly love.

"All right, Jamie. I guess I could've planned it better. But the stars must have aligned, because here we are, together. This is our Halley's Comet. We'll find Mr. Stewart and show him our Jumbo act. He's our ticket into America."

"You're cracked. What makes you think a man like him will even see us, let alone employ us? You're starting to worry me."

"Because I dream of a better life for us?"

"No. Because you're reminding me of Ba."

I hiss in air, which feels cold against my teeth. "Ba was a visionary."

"If you say so."

He can't still be angry with Ba after all these years, can he? The day Mum collapsed, Ba had just brought her the

news—his ratty top hat in his hand—that his bee farm had flown away, taking with it most of our money. Ba was that rare man with a head full of ideas and the courage to make them happen. Of course, they hadn't all worked out.

At any rate, that explains all the dreams I've been having about Ba lately. He's stuck in this life because Jamie's anger is keeping him here.

"Tonight you can sleep in my room. Then tomorrow, you can get off at Queenstown. I have enough money to get you back to London. Aunt Susan would take you in. Find you another job."

I groan. Unlike her parents, Mum's sister visited us after Mum died. She helped me find the job with the Sloanes, and invited Ba and me for the occasional Sunday dinner when her parents would not be around. "Why would I want to go backward?"

"It's *illegal* for us to go to America. Who knows what could happen to you? I'd be half mad with worry."

My jaw clicks in annoyance. America not wanting us worries me, too, but I know how to take care of myself. "I'm not going back."

The oval ball comes sailing at my head. I reach up to catch it, but Jamie snatches it out of the air a fraction of a second before me. He jumps to his feet. "Watch it, you clods."

I scramble to my feet as well, in case there's trouble.

The two young men with the plaid jackets run up to us. But instead of the wrath I expect, they doff their hats, exposing yellow hair thick as thistles.

“Beg your pardon, ma’am,” one says in the flat accent they use in Birmingham. “Brummies” always sound like they have a mouth full of cheese. “Didn’t see you there.” His grimace looks more sheepish than cross, and his tone is apologetic.

My fists loosen. He thinks he’s in trouble. I tip up my nose. “I’ll say. You may have your ball back . . .” The Brummie reaches for the ball, which Jamie is spinning on his palm, but I sweep up a finger. “On one condition.” Jamie pulls the ball away so fast, the Brummie nearly falls over. “You must pass along some generosity of spirit and let those two wee lads over there play catch with you.” I nod toward the back rail, where Wink and Olly are craning their necks at something Bo is showing them in the distance.

“Sure, ma’am.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

Jamie releases their ball to them, and they jog away. Shooting me a weary look, Jamie sits back down.

“Now don’t you miss performing?” I crack.

“Not the kind of performing you want to do. I’ve moved on from that. I doubt I could even do a gunslinger, let alone the entire Jumbo.”

“Sure you can. You just have to practice.” The one-arm handstands we call gunslingers are our specialty.

“And even if all those things with Mr. Stewart happen, I don’t want to go to America. Walking a rope is a hundred times harder than shoveling coal, and I only did it because it was the best way to keep us from starving. Besides, I have work to do. My contract won’t be up for several months.”

I expected resistance, but this is outright defiance. It was easier when it was just the two of us. Our plans always included each other. With his new mates, perhaps his loyalties have shifted. Maybe they've steered him in a different direction than he is meant to go. Especially that shifty ox, Bo.

The *Titanic* rolls and shifts, but I hardly notice. "Has all this saltwater made you slow, Jamie? You were meant for better things. Think of this as a door to a larger world. You always wanted to study astronomy. With our talent, we can get into America, and then you'll have your chance."

"I study astronomy every night."

"I meant in the scholarly sense."

He lets out a frustrated groan, and a group of men cuts their eyes toward us from one bench over. "I like what I do."

"Fine. Do what you like to do. But I'm not going back to London. I'm going to New York, with or without you." I get to my feet, and a cold breeze slices through my thin blouse.

Dragon and phoenix twins are yin and yang opposites that usually create harmony together. But when we disagree, we won't easily stand down, especially the more masculine "yang" dragon, which in our case has always been me.

"Come on, don't be that way. Where are you going?" He follows me to the stairs.

"I'm tired, Jamie." Our footfalls clatter on the steps. "I thought scaling a crane or hiking for miles through this wobbly maze just to find you had wrung me out. But you know what really put me through the wringer? Talking to an

ungrateful clod like you who wouldn't know a good opportunity if it bit his Queen Mum."

I let that sink in before crossing the well deck. Jamie tails me to a doorway into the superstructure marked "First and Second Class Only." Somewhere in there lies Mrs. Sloane's trunk, which I should fetch before they move it into the cargo hold. Plus, I'm getting cold, and I'm not asking my gobby goat of a brother for a coat.

"You can't go there," Jamie hisses from behind me.

"Watch me." Emboldened by my anger, I reach for the door handle.

A crewman appears on the other side, holding up a hand like a stop sign. Another stone in my path. "It's only the upper classes here."

Jamie's grimace burns the back of my head. But instead of pulling me toward safety, that damnable expression prods me forward.



I summon Mrs. Sloane's commanding tone, ignoring the pounding of my heart between my ears. "I *am* a first-class passenger, and I seem to be lost. Which way to B-Deck?" I hold my breath, hoping my deception works at least long enough to retrieve Mrs. Sloane's trunk.

The crewman's face relaxes. "Oh. I'm so sorry, ma'am." Allowing me to pass, he closes the door behind him, cutting Jamie from my view. He stretches out an arm, directing me past a library. "Pass through that door and keep going until you see a grand staircase. B-Deck is one level up."

"Thank you." The door leads to an immaculate corridor floored with octagonal tiles. Can I really just waltz into first class? Every common bone in my body says "stop," yet my legs keep going. Gilded dome fixtures cast spotlights on me. Paneled walls that stretch twice as long between doors as the ones in third class echo my trespassing footfalls.

The excitement I felt upon seeing Jamie gives way to a gripping sensation at my temples that seems to squeeze my brain into the size of a walnut. It's a good thing I came. Spend all day in the bottom of a ship, and one might start thinking down is up. Well, I will get him to see the right of it.

After about forty paces, the corridor widens into an open space housing a tidal wave of a staircase, with wooden banisters that look too ornate to get a good grip. At the foot of the stairs, a cheeky cherub seems to sneer at me, as if to say, *I see through that veil, you faker.*

I sweep by it. *It takes one to know one, imp.*

People stare as I pass, and it occurs to me that the first class is no better at containing their curiosity than the third class. In fact, they stare even longer, as if it is their right.

One level up, the staircase empties into a populated reception area, where well-dressed people drift around upholstered furniture like exotic fish around blue coral, attended to by plainer fish in uniform grey and black. A woman slips off her fur coat and dumps it on her reedy maid, who nearly spills the wineglasses she is holding. Don't I remember those tedious days of being a human coatrack and side table?

People here sail around as if they have all the time in the world, unlike in the third class, where one is not wasteful even with time. Even the stewards, in their short black jackets, seem to drift as silently as clouds as they dispense moisture into crystal goblets. More people float down the tidal-wave staircase from A-Deck. A square clock on the half landing reads 2:25.

Two sets of felted doors—like billiards tables—flank the staircase. I choose the port-side doors, since the even-numbered rooms are on that side. Mrs. Sloane specially requested Room B-42 since she was born in 1842 and could easily remember that number. The first-class rooms probably come with keys, with more stuff to steal, but I hope not.

The noise of the lobby dampens as the doors swing shut. This corridor seems even nicer than the one I just rattled through. It's quieter with an expensive smell to it, like roses and cinnamon spice. Is Mr. Albert Ankeny Stewart in this section? I will need to find a guest list.

I read the room numbers set in gold letters and numbers: B-86, B-84.

A steward approaches. "Afternoon, ma'am."

"Afternoon," I reply curtly, striding away. My heart pounds like a fist calling for drinks.

Another steward backs out of a room in front of me. "No, sir. I'm sorry, sir." He's an Irishman, pronouncing his long *I*'s like "oy's."

"These are not high-quality cigars," barks the room's occupant. "Don't you know your cigars?"

"Yes, I do. I worked in a cigar factory, and let me assure you, these are triple-A rated—"

"Silence. I expect better than this on my ship. Find me better ones, or I shall report you."

The steward bows. One tab of his collared shirt has flipped up, and his tie has pulled free from his buttoned-up black jacket. "Again, I apologize, Mr. Ismay."

I halt at the name. That must be Mr. J. Bruce Ismay, the chairman of White Star Line. Of course, the shipping tycoon is on the maiden voyage of the *Titanic* to take his bows. If he is staying here, these must indeed be the royal suites.

The door slams in the steward's face, knocking his tray off kilter. He keeps a tight grip on the tray, but the floor suddenly



dips, and he falls. The contents of his tray—a silver bowl of cigars and another of nuts—spill everywhere.

I bite my lip, annoyed at Mr. Ismay for putting this stone in my path when I am busy trying to stow away on his ship. I quickly collect cigars and nuts. The sooner I help this man clean up, the sooner I can go about my business.

“No, no, ma’am, please, it’s not your place.”

Is he mocking me? The steward’s plump cheeks flush red beneath his muttonchop whiskers, which are dappled grey and brown. Of course he isn’t mocking me. He can’t see who I am. I put on the posh accent that the Sloanes use. “It’s no trouble.”

As I help him gather up nuts, I’m tempted to store a few in my mouth like a squirrel for later. “At least it wasn’t hot tea and your best china.”

The steward smiles. “True enough, ma’am.”

We put the last of the nuts back in the bowl, and I collect my feet, hoping to make a hasty retreat.

“Do you need help finding your room?”

I hesitate. If B-42 is locked, he might help me open it. “B-42.”

“B-42? That can’t be right. I just put a gentleman in 42. What’s your name?”

Now you’ve done it. The question seems to bounce around the hall, making my ears ring. “I-I’ll be fine. I believe I’m on a different floor.”

“But I can help you with that, too. I insist. It’s the least I can do.” His hopeful green eyes are the color of clover.

Do I dare? Now it would be suspicious if I refuse. And how else am I to find Mrs. Sloane's trunk? I will have to ask *someone*, and this fellow seems the goodly sort, especially now that I've done him a favor.

His flat eyebrows round under his square hairline. "Miss . . . ?"

"Mrs. . . . Sloane. Amberly Sloane." The severe officer kept my ticket for the arrival of Mrs. Sloane. Well, she has arrived.

He hands his tray off to another passing steward, then pulls a paper from his jacket. His finger runs down the page, just like the moisture tracing a path down my back. "Ah. Here we go." A frown replaces the man's hopeful expression. "You hadn't checked in, so we gave your room away. We didn't think you were coming."

I snort, channeling my fear into indignation. "I was attending to"—I straighten my veil, which has bunched to one side—"er, funeral arrangements."

"Oh! I am so sorry." The man has the kind of pasty complexion that, like a cuttlefish, turns color with the slightest pressure.

"Well, where did they put my trunk?"

"I'm not sure, but I will get this sorted at once, ma'am. I'm Steward Andy Latimer, and I'm the chief steward here." He smooths his tie back into place and straightens his collar. Another man, this one in a simple white jacket atop black pants, emerges from a room. "Porter Baxter! See if you can locate Mrs. Amberly Sloane's trunk. Bring it to B-64."

“Right away.” Porter Baxter, who can hardly be older than me, gives a curt nod and hurries off.

“In the meantime, I’ve got the perfect stateroom for you. It’s even better than B-42.”

“Y-you do? I mean, I certainly hope so.”

His kind smile lifts me from my mourning. “Follow me.”