

# SEA QUEENS

SARAH FONSECA





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*For the woman who taught me to drink water each morning.*



*Long may your big jib draw.*

Newfoundland colloquialism; a nautical wish for good fortune and a long life.

*Slow sail'd the weary mariners and saw,  
Betwixt the green brink and the running foam,  
Sweet faces, rounded arms, and bosoms prest  
To little harps of gold; and while they mused,  
Whispering to each other half in fear,  
Shrill music reach'd them on the middle sea.*

“The Sea-Fairies,” Alfred Lord Tennyson







# Prologue



## Marie & Ella

I observed Ella's rage being stoked as she considered any existing omissions from her testimony. Letting the memories guide her, she spoke a final time. "As I have said before, the men in our boat were *anything* but seamen, with the exception of one man. The women all rowed, every one of them. Miss Young rowed every mile," she told the Senator without an iota of sheepishness. "The men could *not* row. They did not know the first thing about it. Miss Swift, from Brooklyn, rowed every mile, from the steamer to the *Carpathia*. Miss Young rowed every minute also, except for when she was throwing up, which she did six or seven times. Countess Rothe stood at the tiller. Where would we have been if it had not been for our women, with such men as that put in charge of our boat? Our head seaman would give an order and those men who knew nothing about the handling of a boat would say, 'If you don't stop talking through that hole in your face there will be one less in the boat.' We were in the hands of men of that kind."

**Wednesday, April 10, 1912**



## Archibald

I have never tucked my tail and fled battle as I did this past winter. The cowardice I despised in colonels during the Spanish-American War has become a quality I now exemplify in the eyes of colleagues and potentially even the President. My President. During my leave of absence from Washington, I freely traveled to Rome — the matriarch of civility, valor, and faith. Throughout the journey, my only sense of foreboding originated from a single memory. When I was ten and one, I trembled before Father O'Donnell during confession. I informed him, in stammers and ineloquent verbiage, that I'd discovered the most primal function of my genitals; I did not afford him any further information on the stimulus that has instigated my longing. Neutrally, he replied: *All timid retreats, Archie, result in exponential consequences.*

Still reminiscing on my days as an altar boy, I pressed a gold coin into the hand of the porter who hauled my seven trunks to room B38. Mine was a

portside suite that aimed to spoil me rotten during the seven-day journey home. The apartment was replete with Gregorian furniture, brocade wallpaper, and a generous iron-framed bed. Its down would certainly soothe my aching back. We in the first class were the last to board; the lot of us, two hundred or so, lingered on the quay in Southampton, clutching our tickets alongside hatboxes, verboten novels, and other fine spoils from Europe. The White Star Line stewards, in uniforms as crisp as new bank notes, briskly guided the second and third classers into the lower decks, where they would presumably remain, out of sight and mind of John Jacob Astor, the capitalist's young lover, and their many acolytes. I wondered how many of those in steerage, willfully ignored now, would cast damning ballots in autumn.

There is personal and occupational tribulation in being gifted in warfare. As Military Aide to Teddy Roosevelt, and then to Willy Taft, I am merely a bookkeeper of strong bodies: Misplacing or losing one man in battle is equivalent to losing one thousand. My career, decorated though it may be, has been forged by learning to grieve — and celebrate — my brothers. No one ever presumes that I have excelled because I am their cloying governess. Least of all the Commander-in-Chief.

The circumstances of the forthcoming presidential election, and those alone, precipitated my extended absence from America. Willy will challenge Teddy, his *swami* and Presidential predecessor, at the polls. Bitter political division is eminent. No insult will remain unhurled; no issue, unleveraged.

Throughout my tour of Europe, a great many wanted to discuss the rise of nationalism and the Ottomon Empire's decline. The Pope himself

droned on and on, our translator repeating the same phrases: *Concern for our people. Vigilante populism.* I dread warning Willy. He and Teddy's newfound spite for one other threatens to make a shipwreck of my communiqué. Willy will cause such a superficial fuss; his speechwriters, maggots in the trough, will make partisan fodder of my reports of a very serious threat. There is no predicting Teddy's rebuttal.

The American public, deserving transparency, will receive hyperbole and the fear mongerer's fang. It is all very simple. My country is destined for war. I, meanwhile, am doomed to lose two trusted friends and many more brethren of the uniform.

To borrow a phrase from my dearly departed mother, the situation is a poorly-aimed pissin' contest. Progressive or Republican, *pah!* What, pray tell, happened to being American? I did not suffer a balmy childhood in the Confederacy's bowels to not espouse unity above all else. Despite my nation's tender age, our leadership's moves are accounted for: Before Willy, there was Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, deposed from Rome's throne yet determined to retake it from the venerated Lucius Junius Brutus at all costs. 1912 would be our 509 B.C.

I shall cross those waters soon. But first, the Atlantic.

With little else to do but smoke and dread my return to the Capitol, I put myself to use. I lent an elderly lady my arm as she traversed the flimsy gangway, held a chirping babe of five months as his mother adjusted her parasol, and amused two lads with my pocket watch. They chased after its glassy reflection as one would a junebug, tripping over one another's shadows.

Resting my miserable spine against a delivery truck behind the crowd, I found comfort in my isolation. Nary a passenger examined me from this position; all eyes were on *her*. I experienced the pointed solitude of sitting in a café and facing its entrance. Patrons entered and exited. I saw them; they seldom noticed me. Joining in on the spectacle, I took her in from stem to stern. I cannot say that she was my type. *Titanic's* rivets were the size of my fists. Her newly painted upper hull, the color of that morning's soft-boiled eggs.

There was much maritime coordination underpinning the cacophony at Southampton. I grew envious of those privy to her intricate blueprints. I was never a naval adviser; the soldiers I led were always bound to the soil. They lived, fought, and drowned where human life was first forged by God: in earth. Water seemed to have its own delicate nomenclature and enemies. Noah would have been well-versed in such matters.

I should have become a seaman all those years before. It would have been much easier to make my brethren happy. All I need do was drink mightily, sing joyously, and carry my own weight. I experienced a preemptive void where Willy and Teddy once existed in my life. Each man was disagreeable and petulant, though undeniably intelligent and doting. In my youth, my mother had yearned for me to join the clergy, perhaps in the attempt to curb what she'd presciently seen as my tendency to grow too close to men ...and to be easily devastated by their failures. Stubborn, I founded my own papacy, abstaining from women in the company of my own sex in war rooms and libraries. Now, look at me. Hollow as a bone. Had I even had breakfast? *Oh, men*. Damn the lot of us.

I began to ideate on a new profession: husband. As perilous as matrimony seemed, it might very well be blissful. With a woman by my side, I would never have to entreat Willy to attend an opera, only to discover his jaw slacked, spittle in his moustache, and his pocket watch clenched in his fist like a hand grenade; all before Lucrezia Bori could perform “Ah! fors'è lui.” A woman would appreciate such outings. She would convey far greater passion than I. She would surpass me in her relishment of her cloth. And while she may be disappointed in me in the bedchamber, she would be fulfilled by stones, mink, and velvet. With a woman by my side, I should be ‘the vain one’ no more!

Once aboard, my bed met every expectation. I was awakened by the horn hours later as we arrived in Cherbourg. After shaving, I changed into my dress uniform and made my way to the dining saloon to find Francis. Through post the week prior, we made plans to meet for a repast upon his boarding in France. There he was, my darling friend, brimming with the fevered tales of Paris’ Latin Quarter. *This poet this, this painter that.* I sank into his willowy hug, content to be held. My back no longer ached.

“The Washington to which you are returning is a kinder one than mine, good friend,” I sighed, prodding my mutton with a fork that was almost too new, too metallic in taste.

“Oh, Archie, your flair for the dramatic never disappoints me. What ails you?”

“The inevitability of international conflict.”

“So, war then?”

“Always,” I replied, considering. “May I confide in you something of note? Wholly unrelated.”

“Only if you permit me to show you the new designs for the Lincoln Memorial,” Frances patted his waistcoat pocket. “I cannot sit on this secret much longer. My trousers are on fire!” Francis was as much of Union stock as I was of Confederate. Our every meeting felt like Appomatox.

“I’ve no doubt,” I replied, chewing. I could not distinguish the metal from the lamb’s blood. “Francis, I am contemplating marriage.”

For the first time in recollection, my darling friend found himself at a loss for words. He was not somber at the prospect of losing me. He was simply smacked speechless.

“I am devastatingly tired, Francis. I do not know if I can bear returning home and continuing to live as things have been. I do not seek to deny myself pleasures. Rather, I am seeking a substitute for all the men in my life who I have loved with limits. Not those I have touched behind lock and key. Those, as always, remain of the least concern.”

“Old Tafty driving you silly once more, eh?”

“Once more and for the final time.”

“With all due respect, Archie,” Francis sighed. His facial hair, I noticed, was finally turning alabaster. There were no follicles left on his head for age to plunder. “In lieu of marriage, have you considered a Pekingese? I see that Henry and Myrta seem quite pleased with their new companion.” He nodded to a nearby table where the canine rested in Mrs. Henry S. Harper’s lap, its tongue laving toward a sterling silver gravy boat, curling and uncurling like a child’s yo-yo. I grimaced.

“Are there consequences to taking a wife while afflicted?” I asked.

“Yes. You may very well kill yourself. It risks heightening the affliction if the woman is not of sound constitution and complete awareness of circumstances. It is best that she be afflicted, too. I could recommend an enlightened Parisian broad, of course by now they are all American expatriates. But if the shrew can be tamed by anyone, it is Major Archibald Butt! The lot of them live quite bodaciously, mostly under Natalie Clifford Barney’s tawdry roof at 20 Rue Jacob. Speaking of whom, we should pay her mother a visit as soon as we return to Washington; I would simply adore seeing her new paintings. But yes, the lot of them have devoted their lives to sin and Sappho! Why, Oscar Wilde’s niece is a right mess; old Dolly injects everything under the kitchen basin into her veins —”

“— I may very well kill myself now as things are.”

Francis fiddled with his champagne before ushering it all down and filling it once more. My initial appraisal was incorrect. This was not speechlessness. It was sobriety; sobriety of everything but drink.

“Well, then, Archie. There is your answer. I wish you much happiness and a relationship of your own choosing. I need my friend to remain afloat, you see.” He raised his glass.

“Cheers.”

“Cheers.”

A waiter approached, leaning in to retrieve the empty champagne bottle and substitute it with a fresh one. A bit too brusquely, I blocked him with my forearm. He leapt back in apology.

“I would like to keep that,” I said.

I held the empty vessel and its cork between my thighs through dessert. As the evening waned, the jewel colored bottle accompanied me back to B38. We had plans for one another.



## Thomson, Thomas, & John

I thought of a Mother Goose lullaby as John swayed between the two stewards who supported his stretcher. Stock-still and unsmiling, each man grasped dowels: one had his fists clenched above our friend's head, the other below his feet. Johnny, meanwhile, grinned foolishly. He was a child taken by a croup. His cheeks were flushed. His broad chest had become a sinkhole. Thomas and I rested our boarding passes in the perturbing gulf between his ribs. It was an uncouth placement; one that John had insisted upon when we arrived in Southampton.

“Come,” he said. “Use me as a credenza. I implore you. It is all I am good for this year.”

John found much humor in our overinvestment. With raven hair and a virile jaw, he was the most beautiful of our lot and received much praise for it, even when in ill health. The man's failed professional ventures were offset by these good looks, his inheritance, and immense affinity for adventure. Yet

should he perceive that our affections were waning, John would retaliate by devising a scene like this one, in which high society viewed Thomas and I as negligent friends.

Nevertheless, we stroked Johnny as though he were our own babe. I combed his hair back from his forehead. Thomas loosened our friend's belt several notches to prevent further gastric distress. I soaked up water from the pier with my handkerchief to mop his brow.

"I'll have you know I spent all morning on my center-part," he pouted. Despite my best efforts, I disheveled him in a way that he never would have never tolerated when on two feet.

In truth, he spent the morning before our final shipping out forcefully depleting himself more than he'd already been by the wretched illness. I listened to his dry-heaves through the walls between our cabins aboard our liner to Southampton until I willed myself to listen no more. I envisioned my eardrums turning like cherry blossom petals, tumbling from my head onto the bed linens.

Johnny was so stripped of nourishment and energy mere hours before that Thomas and I had no other course of action. We would have to, we realized, bathe and dress him for the voyage home. Without a word of debate or delegation, we completed the task.

*Rock-a-bye baby, thy cradle is green;  
Father's a nobleman, mother's a queen;  
And Aggy's a lady, and wears a gold ring;  
And Johnny's a drummer, and drums for the king.*

“Rödsot,” John murmured, gazing toward the sky. It was a clear, dry day. Worrying, I mopped his brow again.

“What?” Thomas asked. Our *paterfamilias* at forty and six, he was lost in cross-eyed observation of *Titanic*’s male passengers. There were the men in steerage who boarded the steamer through a faraway aft gangway. Then, there were our first-class companions; men who milled about, conveying either awe or contempt for the ship on which we all ultimately relied. They were British and American, wearing round black hats like ours, but far finer shoes. After four months away from Manitoba, none of us could compete with their crisp European fashions. But competition was never the motive behind Thomas’ glances — unless, of course, he was staring at a gentleman’s mistress.

“Rödsot,” Johnny repeated. “That’s what the Swedes call dysentery.”

“Ah, Thomson, did you hear that? The credenza speaks, affording us fine anecdotes about life abroad,” Thomas cooed, stroking John’s shoulder. “My most prized investment.”

Were I not fatigued beyond remedy, I would have coveted Thomas’ stamina. Yet the only bed I could bring myself to consider was my own in Winnipeg, free of visitors and warmed by a fireplace.

It was time to go home. It had been time to go home when we boarded RMS *Franconia*. It had been time to go home in Trieste. It had been time to go home in Venice. Yet, being men of the Great White North, we were pathologically numbed to our own corporeality. Thomas, John, and I failed to audit our own weariness. It was not until one of us collapsed in Cairo, trousers drenched in his own nightsoil, that we gave pause. In the fresh air of

Southampton, I could better recognize myself and my companions as mortals. John stench of lavatory and Palmolive. It was a criminal betrayal of the man's usual endearing scent. I missed his Virginia tobacco and vetiver.

"Gentlemen," Thomas said to our steward companions, "Has it occurred to you that those in steerage are, statistically speaking, the most likely to have the purest and most sensual experiences while aboard *Titanic*?"

"Thomas, please," I protested.

"How so, sir?" The one who bore the name *Charlie* on his chest inquired.

"I imagine many of the urchins among us have never had the pleasure of an indoor bath or three meals a day," Thomas continued, gesturing toward those less fortunate passengers who were boarding through E Deck. "So to relish those unprecedented amenities aboard *Titanic*, in addition to the primitive routines they already follow and in which they will surely educate us of finer stock by the time we disembark in New York, it sounds as though the steerage class is destined to have a superior time — and for a fraction of the fee," he winked.

"A fraction of the fee," I sighed. "Always the scrupulous banker, our Tommy."

To my relief, the stewards stared at Thomas blankly. With an eyeless nod to one another, they lurched up the Bridge Deck gangway with John. Uncertain of where we were headed, Thomas and I followed behind at a cautious stroll and then, realizing our time to embark had finally come, a scamper. With our first class peers (a number of whom I faintly recognized

from imported American society papers), we boarded the liner. Smartly, the stewards escorted us into an elevator located behind the Grand Staircase so John would not be subjected to more fragrant and perspiring bodies or stairs than necessary.

As we ascended by cable to A Deck, I heard him whispering another etymological anecdote to his new manservants. Cleopatra himself was in procession, content to hum certitudes instead of declaring war.

“Gentlemen, did you know that the term ‘homesick’ comes from the Swiss? Their mercenaries coined it. “*Heimweh*, they say. It refers to the specific feeling of yearning for the Alps.”

Stephen, the stoutest of the two stewards, was tasked with John’s feet, lest all the blood go to his head. He cracked a smile. “Yes, sir. *Meine Mutter ist Deutsche.*”

“Ah! What a delight. And from where is your father?”

“Egypt, sir. Of British descent.”

Charlie and Stephen unlocked cabin A10 and folded John’s frail figure into bed.

“I shall spare your knowledgeable mind the details of Egyptian crypts, then” he chirped, patting the linens which belted him firmly into the temporary sarcophagus of his bed.

“Will you be alright alone?” Thomas asked, not affording John time to respond. “The steward’s button is located here,” he said, pointing to the ceiling just above our friend’s forehead. “And the chamber pot is here.” He nudged his boot beneath the bed.

“Yes, yes, of course. Too many adventures as of late, lads. All I want is a dreamless sleep.”

“I will visit you this afternoon, John,” I said.

“Very well, but no earlier than half-past four, please.”

Thomas was already pulling me from the cabin by my wrist. I tipped my hat to John and we ventured down two flights with Charlie and Stephen to our own accommodations on C Deck. We bid the stewards farewell, thanking them for their patience with our leftover Lira from Rome.

Thomas took me by the shoulders and bellowed. “Do you know what time it is aboard this Royal Mail Ship?”

Knowing that this query could not be answered with a pocket watch, I shook my head. “Afternoon respite?”

“It is nearly Gentleman’s Hour. After 2 PM, *everything* aboard is ours for the taking. Join me in a sweat and a soak, won’t you?”

Without taking a moment to bemoan our window’s dismal view onto a mechanical crane or marvel at the delicate gilding that lined the suite, Thomas unlatched his trunk and rooted about for athletic *accoutrements*.

I too opened mine. I was not in pursuit of any particular item, but material confirmation that — nomadic though we were — I was indeed a human with a history of his own. The world had grown too big over our months abroad. I desired a smaller one. *Heimweh*, I thought. Only I did not yearn for mountains; I craved the Ontario of my youth. Farmland that gave way to dense forests; both peppered with old men who could tame it all. Such natural skill made eligible bachelors of their sons. Myself included.

My trunk had become a curiosity cabinet for those weeks abroad. There, I deposited an illicitly-procured amphora vase, three sleeves of drawings by Venetian commoners, and a pith helmet. Between a threadbare linen suit and my diary, I rediscovered *The Sea Fairies*. I'd purchased the children's book just before we boarded *Franconia* as a gift for my secretary's bright daughter. Yet I was irretrievably taken by Baum's dreamlike story that followed a sporty lass, accompanied into the ocean by an old seadog named Cap'n Bill and a coterie of mermaids. I would buy another copy for little Ellie, I told myself. This one was meant to be my watery talisman.

Resembling Cap'n Bill himself, Thomas appeared before me, peacocking without a hint of color. He had dressed himself head-to-toe in white thermals. Try as I might to resist, the fabric indeed glorified the man within it. Thomas possessed the chest of a lumberjack and the pelvis of a channel swimmer. Any aspect of him that showed weathering also suggested wisdom. Even the nervous click of his tongue against his palate hinted at the infinite stories he was poised to share. Such implied mastery drew young men to him as it once had Johnny and, years earlier, myself. With Thomas, I had learned to love my most corrupt attributes.

"Come to the gymnasium with me, Thomson. Why let those in steerage have all the physical fun?"

"Very well."

All I had were the riding boots and jodhpurs I purchased in Manitoba ahead of our travels, so I made do with those and a thermal shirt Thomas pitched to me from his own luggage. I shrugged back into my overcoat as we

departed for the boatdeck. Like a stubborn child, I pressed *The Sea Fairies* into my pocket.

This was how it often went with Thomas. John and I were his invaluable companions in society until another fellow prickled his interest and instigated his ephemeral departure. Amid concern and search parties, Thomas would find his way back, cheery and content to shelter with us and us alone for another fortnight. In the early days of our becoming best friends, I did not recognize this behavior for what it was. Instead, I erroneously assumed the regligent role: *Where had I misplaced Thomas? How dare I!*

He had trailed off in cathedrals, at committees, at countless soirees. And now — always one to outdo himself — Thomas had plans to paint this landmark voyage with his own white hot impulse.

Indeed, the gymnasium was ours for the taking. Upon entering, I felt the softest of jolts as *Titanic* pulled from port. A mass of passengers elected to linger on the promenades to bid their land-bound loved ones farewell. Their cheers erupted like fireworks. Though muffled by closed doors, their energy thoroughly penetrated the exercise room. Human innovation! Industrial mechanics! We were off!

However, a man — and particularly one of the woods — has his limits. Technology must not replace every manual pleasure. The room's maps, white walls, and oak columns reminded me of the boathouse at the Winnipeg Country Club. There, every man was his own engine. No coal. No simulation. Just sinew and frigid air.

I perched on a rowing skiff and was surprised to find myself beguiled by its easy back-and-forth, the illusion that I alone was propelling *Titanic* to

Cherbourg. Thomas, impersonating Theodore Roosevelt, ambled atop a mechanical horse; a farcical German innovation. What had necessitated this industrial monster? Had the country lost all of its Hanoverian stallions during the Herero Wars?

An instructor who shared Thomas' name and wore identical thermals assisted a young man onto a stationary bicycle. Then, he spent a half-hour educating him on the dials that controlled the machine's resistance. I was relieved to see fellows who were content to use their bodies; those who clutched dumbbells, gymnast rings, and boxing gloves.

I observed a boy pressing a barbell above his head, his deltoids expanding under the weight like angel's wings. Immediately, I knew he would be the chosen one. He was firm, but would soften under Thomas' tutelage. I did not linger in the gymnasium beyond their covert acknowledgement of one another; the glance that indicated a collision was imminent. As I departed, I noticed Thomas' member firming against the machine's leather saddle. The old man's 'horse' creaked with the shamelessness of a harlot's bed.

Retreating to Johnny's cabin ahead of the requested hour, I did not bother to knock. We were all destined to invade one another's privacy; to see things we wished we had not and notice chance moments we would become honored to have witnessed.

"Thomson, you always break the rules," John chastised. "For which I love you all the more." He was resting upright, with every pillow in the room shoved between his spine and the bedframe.

"You are early, my brother."

“Thomas is already entertaining.”

“Ah,” John clucked. “And will you entertain?”

“I do not know,” I admitted, sinking into a parlor chair that was missing its upholstered cushions. “I am most thrilled to entertain slumber.” Above all else, I craved intention in my affairs. I desired to know *why* I enjoyed companionship. I was exhausted by the mere idea of temporary incapacitation; by the rugged motions of it, no matter how much they made me ache.

“How are you faring?”

“I miss everything. It is so difficult, Thomson, having this thing attack the parts of my body that allow me to feel most alive. What I’d do to be able to devour a seaman and a poached egg without promptly requiring a fainting couch.” He paused. “Don’t tell Thomas, but I might be on the mend. I may very well leave this room before the week is over. He won’t go easy on me any longer if he knows. Not a word.”

“I am relieved to hear that.” *The Sea Fairies’* sharp corners nipped at my hip as I sat, reminding me that I’d brought it with me.

“May I read to you?”

“Yes please, mother.”

In his bed, I was careful to position John so that his head rested on my shoulder. He nestled further into me, tucking his feet beneath his buttocks. A pith helmet identical to my own sat on his end table. I placed it atop my own head. In jodhpurs, other mens’ clothing, and holding a fairytale, I must have finally looked as unhinged as I felt.

I began at the beginning. “‘Why hasn’t anybody seen a mermaid and lived?’ asked Trot, again. ‘Cause mermaids is fairies, an’ ain’t meant to be seen by us mortal folk,’ replied Cap’n Bill. ‘But if anyone happens to see ‘em, what then, Cap’n?’ ‘Then,’ he answered, slowly wagging his head, ‘the mermaids give ‘em a smile an’ a wink, an’ they dives into the water an’ gets drowned.’”

By the time we encountered an Aristocratic Codfish character, I had lost John to slumber. Despite voicing feverishness, he felt cold to the touch. I yearned for the things which made us Canadian. People from iced-over places know the best ways to stay warm. Accessing those amenities elsewhere was another tale, however. I wished for a bearskin rug, a fireplace, and a whiskey beverage.

Joining John in rest, I did not rise until Thomas nosed the cabin door open many hours later. Dusting the sleep from my eyes, I was able to identify his cherry cheeks, his unkempt hair, his right sock garter betraying its singular duty as the sock, its elastic spent, sagged to meet his boot. His key attribute had deflated; meanwhile, his chest had swelled. Thomas’ fountain of youth always spewed forth men younger than he.

With an arm around my waist, he scooped me up. I was escorted back to our suite to dress for dinner. John and I had slept clear through Cherbourg, he remarked, impressed.

Our bed was made; there were no signs of an impromptu visitor. Thomas may be a scoundrel. But he is also, above all else, a gentleman.



## Marie & Ella

I had encountered many hells in my thirty-six years. In 1904, I became the first woman pianist to accompany Lord Tennyson's "Enoch Arden" before a large audience at the Shoreham Hotel; upon my bow, several young men in orchestra seating pelted me with sun-softened tomatoes, motivated wholly by my sex. Four years later, I was tasked with nurturing young Archie Roosevelt through measles and a debut recital while his *true* mother gallivanted abroad. While on vacation in Green Spring Valley in 1910, I was kicked by a rogue stallion at a steeplechase; my body remained bruised and prone for weeks.

But none of those events prepared me for the frowsty hell of boarding *Titanic*. Ella, Nellie, Sante, and I began our day on the 10th of April with a

six-hour train ride from Paris to Cherbourg. Our real troubles would begin portside, as the French national anthem played on end and Ella voiced a desire to remain far out of earshot of “La Marseillaise.” We would first be climbing onto *Nomadic*, a tiny tender ship that would ferry us to her. *Titanic*, White Star Line informed us, would be too large to enter the harbor.

“She and I have this in common,” Ella had boasted as we dressed in Paris that morning of departure. She rubbed her rounded bust bodice proudly while Nellie helped her into her remaining garments. I too admired my Ella’s size; fifty-five years walking this earth had sculpted her into a deity. She was forged to be nourished, revered, and humored. Nellie and Sante were paid to do so. I, an unlikely servant, was content to perform these movements without charge. I recalled that small, ancient statuette discovered several years prior in Austria. Carved of limestone, her width nearly exceeded her height. Her legs were powerful; her bosom, tremendous.

“I seem to have beaten Josef Szombathy in discovering the Venus of Willendorf,” I remarked to my good Washington friend Archibald Butt at the time. Never an easy one to rouse, I was pleased when he retrieved a handkerchief from his breast pocket to stifle a series of screeching laughs.

*Women! Statues! Ships!* These are the things for which I now live. But on Wednesday, April 10, 1912, these were the articles which narrowly ended me.

I was responsible for Ella’s newly-acquired French hens. They clucked about their wire crate on the crowded train from Paris to Cherbourg, likely dismayed by this foreign language — *English* — spoken rapidly by our fellow travelers. I felt as disoriented as they; how long had it been since I’d thought

*How are you* instead of *Comment allez-vous*? I never imagined that returning to America would resemble an opiate fiend's ugly withdrawal.

It was in Cherbourg that Ella had the accident that properly christened our chaotic journey home.

"Come, Marie," she beckoned maternally with a pat on my bottom, all but herding me aboard the little ship that would lead us to the much larger ship. With our hands full of fowl, papers, and personal effects, Nellie, Sante, and I were unable to swiftly respond to Ella's abrupt spill down *Nomadic*'s gangway; there was simply no way to not inspire collateral damage. Thankfully, a fleet of stewards and concerned passengers swarmed over Ella, uprighting the woman and taking charge of her small bag and boarding pass.

"DRATTED STRUMPET!" Ella bellowed. Tears began to pool at the rims of her spectacles.

"I can't..." she cried. Her reading glasses began to fog. Ella, unable to rest any weight on her right leg, simpered, balancing on the other, wobbling to-and-fro. Her ankle, swelling more each the second, was so clearly sprained. "Ow... OW."

"Ella, my dear, it's going to be alright," I assured over the clucks of her irritated chickens.

"Sirs! Don't just stand there, help her!" Nellie barked.

Two stewards dashed over and wedged themselves beneath each of my darling's arms. The human crutches raced forward; we followed. Our helpers ensured Ella had seating aboard *Nomadic* equivalent to our first class arrangements aboard *Titanic*. They toiled delicately, sitting Ella down on a bench and elevating the affected ankle to hip's height.

“A doctor will be available to see you aboard your liner home. I estimate in the next hour,” one promised.

“I’d much prefer a barmaid,” Ella groaned.

But an hour passed, then two. Neither antidote or absinthe precipitated. Aboard the transfer, there was nowhere for us to go. Our much-lauded vessel home to New York was late. Among our perspiring cluster of first-class passengers, rumors persisted that *Titanic* had narrowly struck another liner when departing Southampton.

As a child in Washington, my father had impressed upon me a fine saying until it became trite. It was by one Mrs. George Washington: *The greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions and not on our circumstances.* We were more Virginians than Washingtonians. I was molded by Southern convention; by the cotillion debut and the tissue-thin pages of the King James Version. To witness my father esteem the fairer sex’s wisdom was so improbable an event that I latched onto this turn of phrase stronger still, and particularly on April 10.

Ella Bertha White, you see, was everything my disposition craved. She was the nation I worshipped, whose fruits I devoured; the country for whom I would have bared my breast and taken the enemy’s arrow. Enraptured, I listened to her rhapsodize on suffrage, her coveted Russian silverware collection, and the pitfalls of marriage. Long before I met her, Ella had been Mrs. J. Stuart White. Mr. White’s death gifted Ella with wealth, societal stature, and privacy. It also left her with enough able-bodied years to pursue those who enchanted her the most. I gravitated toward older companions;

Ella, much younger. Our meeting had been auspicious and otherworldly. But no more so than Ruth and Naomi.

And thus I accepted responsibility for her hens, purchased from a commoner in the Parisian Latin Quarter a fortnight prior, as my responsibility; chirruping and stenching up the Cotentin air like a fisherman's discarded cleanings. Though obnoxious, the birds were indeed beautiful. Their iridescent copper feathers caught the sun and exhibited flashes of oceanic blue and green. The fleshy combs atop their heads reminded me of a tropical flower Ella and I observed at the New York Botanical Garden the year prior: *Kalanchoe luciae*; the paddle plant. Trying though Ella and her passions may be, at least my fate was fairer than Ella's manservant. Sante, who loathed live game and outdoorsman pursuits, was tasked with her crate of cocks; all quite content to crow the sun down.

When *Titanic* finally approached near six o'clock that evening, everyone aboard *Nomadic* whistled and applauded. Ella wished to rest before seeing a doctor; her faithful human crutches obliged, assisting her aboard. Reluctantly, I handed off the fowl to an English carpenter named John who promised to take me to visit them daily. He would fetch me at eleven o'clock the next morning.

"We will take the elevator so as to not cause you more strain, Miss," one man-shaped crutch offered Ella.

"If you've come bearing food for thought, I will most certainly be left feeling famished. The strain has already been done, lad! It's a pity White Star Line would rather cut costs by providing a negligent number of helpers to the passengers who pay the greatest tolls. I suppose I would have been

better treated in steerage. At least I'd have been put to bed by now." Uncertain of what to say, the steward — still straining under her weight — nodded and continued with the task at hand.

I was no stranger to Ella's brutish rapport with men. In a great many instances, I adored her ability to make a grown fellow in the wrong sulk away in a haze of humiliation. I recall a time in Manhattan when she raised such a stink about a lackluster booth at the Metropolitan Opera that the conductor and lead cellist worked to assign her permanent seating. Yet it turned my stomach when she grated against the souls of working men, especially those who stood to gain little else than three pounds' wages. I reminded myself to offer the stewards gratuity commensurate to their trouble.

"Miss Young! Miss Young!" I heard from below. Looking down, I was shocked to see the devil himself: Major Archibald Butt, no doubt on his way to dinner. That faithful rapier of his was harnessed around his hips, dangling pendulously and provocatively against a thigh. His dress uniform gleamed more than *Titanic* herself. Noticing his gloves and equestrian boots, I sighed. I doubted that there was a single pony in the ship's log, though I appreciated Archie's passion for the convivial.

"Who on earth is that?" Ella inquired, unable to determine the coordinates of the faceless voice.

"Archie!" I exclaimed. "Surely you remember my friend Archibald, Ella! He worked for Teddy's State Department while I was the children's piano teacher."

Leaning closer, I whispered in her ear, “Before you came along, he was my twilight companion for the symphony and opera. He would always weep during *Lakmé’s* Bell Song, you see.”

“I see,” Ella replied knowingly. She peered over the railing. “Greetings, Mr. Butt!”

“Miss Young! Mrs. White! Fancy seeing you!” He squinted, hand at his brow, observing our party’s queer predicament: Two women (one limping, one not), two servants, two stewards; all of us thinly dusted in chicken feathers.

“Is everything alright up there? Did I hear cocks?”

“And hens! For our home in Briarcliff,” I explained. “Ella took a nasty tumble boarding our transfer. Nothing a night’s rest can’t remedy, I’m sure.”

“My condolences! I am certain this won’t spoil your entire voyage. Are you still as athletic as you were in Washington, Marie?” Archie asked. He swung his cane back and forth as though he wished to pitch it up to me.

“Pardon?”

“For our Ella! Catch.”

With two hands, I strained over the rail toward the soaring enamel rod. I was fortunate to grasp it between my forearm and chest. The handle struck the brim of my hat, pushing it past my eyes. Our group laughed. Ella applauded as I handed her the cane.

“Get off me!” she ordered. The stewards retreated, content to find nearby passengers who appreciated their service.

“Still athletic, *indeed!* Remember, it illuminates if you twist the crown,” Archibald added.

“The wonderful material benefits of working for the President,” Ella marveled.

Upon this remark, I noticed Archie flinch, his smile receding beneath his mustache. He seemed so tired and a little gaunt. I always knew Southern men to increase in size with age. Archibald, however, seemed to be receding. If the papers were any indication, his position within the administration was fading from focus, too. Each and every headline appeared devoted to the forthcoming Presidential election; not military strategy. Perhaps this was a problem of success. Where do the heroes go when war is over?

“Yes,” he finally sighed, willing his boyish grin to return. “Well, I must be off, ladies! I hope to see you both for an aperitif sometime this week.”

“Of course,” I said. “Thank you for being a gentleman as always, Archibald.”

“Of no consequence! Farewell.”

Ella, whom I would never term sentimental, seemed touched by his gesture. With her new mobility, she reclaimed her dignity with a slight hobble.

As we entered cabin C32, Nellie turned to me, hesitating.

“Yes, Nellie?”

“I hope this is interpreted with no offense, Miss,” she said, clasping at her own hands. “But I have worked for Miss Ella for a great many years now, through one husband and many ill suitors,” she began. “And never have I seen her as delighted as she is among you and your peculiar people.”

“Of no offense at all, Nellie,” I said as I rinsed my hands of chicken feathers in the stateroom’s lavatory. “But it is of immense burden. Peculiar people, you see, only know how to solve peculiar problems.”

We exchanged the somberest of smiles before returning to Ella’s side.

**Thursday, April 11, 1912**



## Archibald

In the afternoon, I enjoyed a vigorous game of squash with three young men returning to Georgetown from Cannes. Though my *ad hoc* team suffered greatly, I appreciated the increased heartbeat and fellowship. The game hardly resembled tennis as Teddy played it — come rain, sleet, snow, or rapture — but it satiated my muscles just enough. Subsequently, I freshened up and forayed to the reading and writing room located just one deck above my suite. I carried the prior night's Gout Americain bottle as a collegiate does a pigskin, tucked just beneath my arm.

The first class stratifications began to take shape after *Titanic*'s final passengers boarded in Queenstown. Enterprising bachelors and business-minded husbands assumed residence in the smoke room, where they slid personalized decks of cards from waistcoat pockets and dealt poker and professional deals into the wee hours. The reading and writing room shared a wall with the lounge. There, society women strong-armed their daughters

into having tea with other society women who boasted available sons. The more bohemian of their lot lingered on the lower decks to purchase lace and other handmade goods from the Irishwomen coming aboard in Queenstown.

The reading room remained a liminal realm, largely occupied by pensive women consumed by the epistolary and the criminal. Stationery and Arthur Conan Doyle novels were strewn across silk settees where their owners read, wrote, and napped without interruption. Occasionally, a fellow would enter with *The Daily Courant*, only to retreat for the more lively and masculine environment near the ship's aft.

I sat at a table looking out onto the promenade and commenced peeling the label from my bottle. Licking my thumb, I ebraded away gold foil and glue until the emerald vessel was fully transparent. I would never be a seaman in this lifetime. However, that needn't prevent me from partaking in their finest ritual. In 310 B.C., the Greek philosopher Theophrastus pitched the first message in a bottle out to sea, endeavoring to study currents. So too would I. I would appraise tumultuous waters; the likes of which ole Theo had never conceived.

I retrieved my mother of pearl fountain pen from my breast pocket and raised it above the ship's stationery as Neptune would elevate his trident to an adversary. I took in the saline air billowing through an open *oeil-de-boeuf* window.

She departed me four years ago, while on a journey to Liverpool. Still, I would write to her.

MY DARLING MOTHER:

How I miss your laugh.

Of late, I have been reflecting upon the time I first wrote to you from Washington in April 1908 — it is nearly four years to the day! That was such a sweltering, chaotic spring. And I, naively hopeful despite the grim battles I'd fought abroad. I steeled myself against reporters eager to take my photo. I toiled to procure and break a stallion worthy of the Commander-in-Chief. I was congratulated many a time for being ordered to the White House to serve. Yet still I defected gently, stealing away to the West Sitting Hall to send you my thoughts, scribbled with much haste while seated at the piano. I envisioned your roar of amusement and delight when I first wrote you and each time that followed. It felt as though you were there with me, deciphering my pen's strokes as an operator does a telegram. I hope my sounds linger with you as yours do with me.

If you receive the daily news wherever you are today, you will know that Roosevelt has started a fire on the very paper on which it is printed. He is pillorying the press for ambling up to Taft, yet never considering that his opponent offers a less strenuous reportage experience. Without ever engaging in a true dialogue with a reporter from *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* or *The New York Times*, Teddy has succeeded in writing off his opponent and the press in which he will ultimately grow more dependent.

Naturally, this has all been very difficult for me. When I was young, you told me that men, apart from priests and sailors, were not worth their salt. All these years later, I feel compelled to apologize for my professional

ambition: at the time, I did not know any other way. Now I do. Though my path is now very much irreversible.

I am presently aboard RMS *Titanic*, en route to Washington by way of Chelsea, Manhattan. You may recall the gossip about the steamer and her sister, *Olympia*, some years ago. Just before you departed us, *Nashville Banner* observed that two impossibly immense liners were to be constructed in Belfast and that they would weigh in at 50,000 tons. *Leviathans*, the paper called them.

It is my duty to inform you that all these speculations are certifiably true. Granted, I have not seen nearly enough of her 840 feet. I am quite worn out. My wanderings will have to wait several days. A dispatch will follow this one, informing you of my social and architectural discoveries.

What I can tell you: She is the finest vessel the world has ever seen, with winding wrought iron staircases, saltwater pools, and palatial gathering spaces that inspire gregariousness in her passengers; they would appear to be on a mission to wear out her amenities before we disembark at Pier 59!

Mother, I did happen to catch a glimpse of Miss Marie Grice Young from afar yesterday! We exchanged salutations as she and her misfortunate companion boarded in Cherbourg. Miss Young, however, looked markedly healthy, as though she had received an appropriate quantity of sunrays and fine meals during her trip to France.

Surely you remember her, Mother. After President Roosevelt was inaugurated, she served as piano teacher for his children. Although Marie, like myself, was frequently identified to perform domestic duties outside our roles, such as accompanying private recitals and helping Mrs. Roosevelt

select choirs for holiday parties. When I would accompany Mrs. Roosevelt to external dinners, Marie would often remain at home with the young ones. In so many ways, we have already been betrothed.

While I was notably fond of Marie during her time in the Roosevelt administration's employ, I suppose the constant, quotidian demands of my position prevented me from considering her anything other than a highly competent colleague. It was not until yesterday — both of us a world away from Washington and all — that I considered she might be the lady of which you always spoke: blonde and generous, curious and gifted, who would put hot coals down my long johns were I to ever doubt her radiance. Marie is indeed sharp as a tack; she was the only soul in the Presidential residence who dared to speculate that Teddy had named his fifth child, that jocular runt, after me.

So much remains perilously unknown, though I find it apt to request your blessing in this quest, now that I have the time to consider the fairer sex, no matter if it be Marie or another enticing woman behind the white veil. I apologize that this final demonstration of manhood has taken me so long.

I now see, as in Genesis, that it is time to become fruitful and multiply.

Your affectionate son,  
ARCHIE.

I closed my pen and coiled the letter around it, winding the paper into a tight scroll that would slide easily into the bottle. The vessel was still

pungent with the prior night's drink. Nothing that a cork and the ocean couldn't mask.

I made my way to the stern, taking time to exchange pleasantries with the acquaintances who strode past on the starboard promenade. Of all the passengers which crossed my path, I regretted not knowing the woman — abundantly Midwestern yet as ample as a Georgia peach — who strolled past with a dog as large as a donkey.

“Such a polite boy, aren't you?” she murmured to the Great Dane as he paused to sniff my shoe. “He recognizes a fellow gentleman when he sees one,” she explained. Sensitive despite his size, the animal responded to her gentlest tugs on his lead. The beast lifted his domed head to eye me appraisingly.

“I recognize a fellow dog when I see one,” I considered responding..

Instead, I bit my lip. With a small bow to the fine lady, I continued my walk. I did not stop until the deck was quiet enough for me to pitch my bottle overboard in solitude, all while considering sending myself overboard with it. As though through nature alone, a poem was ushered to my lips, its every syllable hushed by the breeze:

*The sea is calm tonight.  
The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light  
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,  
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay....  
Ah, love, let us be true*

*To one another! for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

**Friday, April 12, 1912**



## Thomson, Thomas, & John

We devoured the pastries delivered to our stateroom. Then, we requested another platter and a fresh pot of earl grey.

“All your talk of those in steerage living like kings for seven days,” I said to Thomas, not bothering to wipe the powdered sugar from my lips or swallow what I was chewing. “And here we are, scarfing our breakfast like the dogs of peasants.”

“Kind as we had been to our bodies up until this journey,” Thomas replied, dusting his fingertips on a handkerchief, “I do suppose they are now on par with those just below us. Utterly tattered — entrails and all.”

After dressing, we checked in on John’s own entrails. Propped up in bed against his pillow bunker, our friend dozed, drooling onto the *Harper’s Weekly* that was still open across his lap. Thomas moved John’s breakfast pastries from the table to the nightstand, should he have the means to eat. I touched his forehead; the fever and chills seem to have broken, leaving him

filmed with evaporated saltwater that resembled dry skin. Seemingly, he was on the mend.

That afternoon in the smoking lounge, Thomas instigated a sparring match with me as he lit his cigar. Making the mistake of conveying my fatigue and *Heimweh* for Canada's forests, he scoffed and urged me to be more mischievous during this final stretch. "This is precisely why *rendezvous* is essential to men of your tender age," he pressed. "Do not grow impotent and miss out on wonders because you are — what was it?" He mimicked my voice. "Ah yes! Feeling 'slower and wanting solace.'"

Had he spent time with me in lieu of that strapping lad from London the night prior, he would have known I was *plenty* virile. Depraved thoughts entered and diffused through my mind as coal did the ship's boilers. Alone in our room as he achieved *la petite mort* God knows where, I removed a parcel of illustrations from my steamer. Between the sketches I acquired in Venice, I'd hidden a bit of contraband purchased in Trieste: a snapshot of a fellow, no older than twenty and three, sitting nude atop a table covered with a leopard's hide. Taken by a sixty year-old artist named Guglielmo Plüschow whose masculine 'mischief' ostensibly exceeded Thomas', I was charmed by its playful statement. With arms extended above his head, tambourine in hand, knees parted, the boy scoffed in the face of the primitive loincloth. *This* is the way man was meant to be, it seemed to say, not concealed within but *stroked* by the finest furs. Its tenderness reminded me of John and his enthusiasm for delicate touches and trinkets, the least of which was *The Sea Fairies*.

I unbuttoned my trousers and grasped my warmth, my gaze trailing down the boy's slender torso, curving along the contours of his buttocks. My breath hitched and I experienced sheer relief. Best of all, my bed was in close proximity.

I slept like the dead.



## Marie & Ella

How I wish that our next complete day aboard RMS *Titanic* could have possessed the serene tenderness of the prior night's slumber! I had drifted away so swiftly in Ella's arms. Her hands had been firmly laced about my waist; her soft chin, tucked into a dimple in my shoulder. I did not mind her raucous snore or the tickle of her nightcap's tassel against my eyelashes. The precious, private pose reminded me of our early days when Ella would make an elaborate performance of devouring me, bonnet to slippers.

Yet Thursday morning brought with it the strife of our life together. My hand wandered beneath Ella's chemise promisingly, my little grasps prompting both of us to sigh. I took handfuls of her rump, her firm thighs, even the coarse, wild hairs that coated her Cyprian arbour. I longed to part her. She soon found my bosom as she always did: a small hand reached out, pulling the tip of my breast to attention.

As my hands descended to Ella's calves, I was shocked to find her limb grotesquely swollen. Lifting the gown's fabric revealed a ballooning leg seemingly on the cusp of pustulization, its fair skin marbled by purples and yellows.

"You were encouraged to call the ship's doctor," I said. "Maybe now is the time?"

"Marie, it's nothing of concern," Ella murmured. "Please do go on. I do adore how you are petting me, my sweet."

"Ella, *I* am concerned."

"No need. I've fared far worse. Remember my trip to the Galapagos?"

"Were we not having a divine morning?"

"Yes. Yes we *were*," Ella said spitefully.

I sighed, rearranging my bosom in my nightgown and waiting for the tell-tale color to drain from my cheeks before summoning Nellie and Sante. They knew the nature of our friendship. Still, I strove to maintain a modicum of decorum; to resist challenging each employee's ardent Catholicism or subjecting them to an image they would be unable to remove from psychic circulation. Their support would be essential; I daren't take it for granted.

Nellie arrived from their quarters, still pinning up her hair. "Good morning, Miss Young. Good morning, Mrs. White. Can you smell the ocean?" She inhaled deeply.

Ella groaned, abundantly annoyed. "Can someone kindly tell me what is happening?"

"Nellie, would you do us the favor of pressing the steward's button? Ella needs her leg checked after by a physician."

“HOW DARE YOU TREAT ME LIKE AN ANEMIC CHIL—” my lady roared.

“Nellie, the button,” I repeated. Rolling atop Ella, I gripped her soft wrists above her head to still her flailing attempts to obstruct the maid.

Wincing as though gripping a skillet without a mitten, Nellie obliged. The buzz was promptly followed by a knock at the cabin’s door.

“You rang, madam?”

“I most certainly did not!” Ella bellowed.

Sante, also still dressing, opened the cabin’s door with a polite nod, the lone calm within our collective tempest, as always. Throughout the years of knowing him, I pondered his life before the Americas. What tumult had he witnessed and from whom did he learn to persevere? Would he blink if his employer were to slap him? Surely her words had done far worse.

Bearing his initials, the ring on Sante’s left index finger was the singular indicator that betrayed his neurotic constitution. Using his thumb and middle finger, he would twirl the band around the tensed digit, faster and faster still, but for seldom longer than a full minute; it was a brief Central Park carousel ride that delighted me — a woman much too senior to be enjoying such childish play — until its very end.

“*Buongiorno*, sir. A doctor at once, please. The Misses — Mrs. J. Stuart White — has sprained her leg.”

“MY NAME IS ELLA WHITE,” she corrected in vain.

The steward nodded and made to leave, but paused when Ella emitted a cry akin to Coney Island’s gulls.

“Please, sir,” Sante probed the gentleman’s lapel for a name. “...Mr. Beasley! As you can see, she is in exceptional distress.” Anemic child, *no*, yet she certainly was adept at emulating one’s pout and ruby complexion.

The steward departed with the sea breeze. Nellie pulled the door closed and drew me close. “You should leave, Miss. Some fresh air on the promenade, maybe?” She breathed in my ear. “We will tend to Mrs. White.”

“I suppose someone should check on the hens,” I reasoned. I recalled the sweet carpenter, in his brand new White Star Line uniform; so clearly proud of his occupation and what lay ahead. He promised to summon me at eleven. I would bide my time away. Ella doled out insults as I dressed myself. With Nellie’s help, she left bed long enough to relieve herself and procure a pastry from the breakfast platter before returning and commencing her tirade. As I numbed myself to her chastisement, I found beauty in her ability to meet her needs. I began to believe no other living woman required the same victuals to thrive as the former Mr. J. Stuart White. She needed a buffet, a bosom, a baroque symphony, a boarding pass, and — remorsefully — a brawl.

“I love you,” I told her as Sante opened the door for me. “No, I do not recall what transpired in the Galapagos, although I will say that your singular life puts any of Mr. Charles’ Darwin’s expeditions to shame. You, Ella White, are the only slithering, hissing organism since the dawn of creation who has curiously, deftly, and incalculably stolen my heart.”

“In that case, you can have it back,” Ella spat as the door closed. From the hallway, I could hear the groan of the mattress as she flopped back onto the bed.

*She truly knew the movements*, a piano teacher of mine would remark in response to a particularly moving recital by a deft pupil. The same could be said for Ella. She had long mastered the conversational codas that left me bruised, fatigued, and — somehow — still coveting more of her.

As I entered the fresh air, *Titanic's* horn blared, indicating that we would soon cast anchor in Queenstown. As with Cherbourg, she would not be able to enter harbor; passengers would be delivered and taken from us with the assistance of tenders once more. I wondered how many casualties — a slip of the toe like Ella's, or something far worse — would befall those traveling on this behemoth.

I leaned over the promenade's guardrail. The breeze tickled my face less as the ship slowed speed. Perhaps Ella's comparison from the day prior was incorrect. If my dearest resembled *Titanic* in any capacity, it was in their shared ability to force everything and anyone in their vicinity to bend to their fire-forged wills.

I returned to our C Deck accommodations near eleven o' clock to await John. A heated conversation between Ella and an unrecognizable male emitted from behind the room's closed door. I was content to linger in the hall, awaiting my new friend as an adolescent does a suiter.

He approached just as a nearby clock chimed the hour, adjusting his seaman's cap.

“Good morning, Miss.”

“Marie,” I nodded. He was but a boy still, surely no older than twenty-five. John's green eyes passed back-and-forth across my face, glinting. He was unnerved by his own gallantry.

“Marie. Miss Marie,” he said, humming through his *Ms*. “Right this way.”

I followed him across decks and down stairwells. “Thank you so much for assisting me. It must seem so curious to you, a lady being aboard a ship such as this but being unable to think of anything but her chickens!”

“Not at all, *Mmmiss Mmmarie*. My own lady was quite attached to her own fowl; would force me to feed them fancily, and twice on Christmas. Chickens, eating poached eggs! Can you imagine?”

“That does indeed ease my fears. I am sorry to hear of your loss.”

“Oh! No loss, *Mmmiss Mmmarie*. Just a separation of childhood sweethearts, you see. If you’ll forgive my candidness, but in youth, I thought I wanted a wife. But I believe what I was desiring most was a child. It is the sphinx’s riddle I ‘ave yet to solve.”

“I understand.” As we made our descent, the air became thicker and warmer. Beads of sweat came to my brow. The carpenter offered me his handkerchief. I accepted.

“Here we are,” John said, holding open the door to the dog kennels for me with a bow.

The birds’ crates had been tucked between an unflappable Great Dane and an Airedale. The canines, expressing more interest in John and I, seemed to have assumed the occupation of sentinels to poultry quite naturally. Our chickens, in a continued state of disarray, seemed to now fancy themselves canines, clucking as dogs bark and attempting to scratch at their feathers with spurred feet.

All was well. The birds scurried to greet the handfuls of feed I cast over their wire homes, the large plumes of copper feathers atop their heads grazing the cage's clean floor. The dog kennel's orderlies had treated them with the dignity of German Shepherds; their drinking water sparkled. There was no trace of droppings within the crate. Ella would be pleased to know that her birds were being afforded their equivalent of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

"Do you feel chickens are easier to tend than children?" John inquired. He lingered near the kennel's entrance, allowing me an unnecessary degree of privacy.

"Oh, I wouldn't know, Mr. Hutchinson. I haven't any of my own. What I do know is that children have supernatural ears. When you do crack that riddle of yours, please treat them to music lessons. You will be serenaded for a lifetime — and by something far more lovely than clucks." I looked at the hens. "I mean no disrespect, darlings. You are a perfect specimen of what you are."

"Duly noted, *Mmmiss Mmmarie.*"

John insisted on escorting me above once more, promising to continue our daily excursions into the sultry below. I offered him a gratuity, which the carpenter accepted with much humility. "It's such good luck to receive gold on a first voyage," he murmured.

By that afternoon hour, we were preparing to depart Queensland. I strolled along the C Deck promenade, praying that Ella's ailments and spat with modern medicine had simultaneously self-resolved.

An Irish woman from the third class, dressed in black from head to toe, had been permitted access to the first class quarters to sell her white lace finery. It was increasingly cold and windy, yet I approached her as one would lady death: cautiously, my jaw slacked in wonder. For one of such humble means, her display was impressive: lace dresses, drapery, and hairpieces surrounded her. Unsmiling, she held a long span of the material that would certainly appeal to those who patronized the French fashion houses; what potential for glamour it held!

Taking her in, I noticed that the frontispiece of her dress was crafted from the material, dyed black to match the rest; a risque addition to what would otherwise be considered mourning attire. Behind her, a lace baby bonnet had been affixed to the ship's side for showcasing.

I regretted not having asked John why he thought I knew anything at all about children. Such conversations seldom transpired in New York. Ella was quick to remind me of how society perceived us: She, a grating spinster who wielded an influential scepter; I, a bohemian suffragette best suited for international wedlock. It was presumed that our travels were philanthropic on Ella's part. That she, with deep pockets and a hardened attitude toward charity, was determined to find me a reputable suitor. Naturally, we had many a good laugh and sigh of relief at high society's naïve speculation.

Father had long since abandoned the subject of me bearing children; My profession had brought the family enough valor. There were so few people in Washington and abroad that could say they had won the hearts of each Roosevelt child: Teddy Junior, Alice, Kermit, Quentin, Archie, and Ethel. What I felt for them spanned two languages — English and the

chromatic. It swelled my heart and veins to the point of hysterical pregnancy.  
I nurtured, I disciplined, I educated. *What, if anything at all, was I missing?*

The thought gnawed at my marrow as I returned to Ella.



## Archibald

Two days into the voyage, I spotted her from afar once more. The misfortune of the soldier is that these surveying skills are never compatible with the civilian world. Ultimately, they come across as neurosis or rabidity. Yet wherever she found herself in the afterlife, my mother traveled to my side. “Forgive yourself,” she insisted. So I did. I took in Marie as she sat alone at Café Parisien on the starboard side of B Deck, sheltered by exotic plants hanging from the trellis behind her: a nymph in the wilderness.

The manner in which she brought the petite glass of gin to her pearlescent lips. How she tilted her head back in laughter at a waiter’s wry remark. I studied her form as one does a topographical map. While some might say Marie’s middle thirties were treating her less kindly than her twenties, I begged to differ. I found the sinew that had only recently claimed her body to be a thrilling change from the nymphet who once tailed her pupils from the Oval Office to the White House stables. Marie’s cropped hair, sheltered by a hat bearing French pheasant feathers, only served to make her

seem more like the stronger sex. She recalled the fairies who lingered in Lafayette Park after dark; how eager to please they were!

“May I accompany you?” I bowed, finally entering her line of vision.

“Archie! Why of course.” She all but withdrew a wicker chair from beneath the table for me.

“It was my hope that we would meet for a drink. Where is your friend, Ella?” I looked around. Something told me that Ella was the type of broad to be heard first and seen later.

“She has been advised to rest,” she said. “Strict doctor’s orders. Though I cannot say she is taking to it gently.” Marie lifted her glass. “Surely you know by now that she is a very powerful woman. This is to say that powerful women, when incensed, can make sand of a bedside lamp and great floods of a hand basin.” Her eyes grew wide as she divulged this detail of the morning’s domestic spat.

“Oh, my.”

“She will be fine by New York, I am certain.”

“Marie, I cannot say I would have handled incapacitation any better given all the stimulating experiences this boat has to offer. Imagine having attended *Mona* this spring, only to have lost your sense of hearing upon entering the Metropolitan Opera!”

“Should that have happened, I would have stormed the stage and wept at Louise Homer’s gifted feet. Thank you for your empathy. You have always been my favorite gentleman, Mr. Butt.”

I restrained my blush. “How have you been?”

“Would it be cruel of me to say that I have been relishing my solitude?”

“Would you like me to make myself scarce?”

“No, no. Please stay. I say this in regard to Ella. It is nice to order for one; to never dread Nellie weeping or Sante’s muttered curses.”

“I see. No. It isn’t cruel at all. Remember Matthew 6:6! ‘But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet...’”

“...and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret,” Marie finished. My loins did not buckle at the ease of our conversation, though something more tethered to my soul trembled with excitement.

“May I ask the same of you?”

A server appeared and I accepted the same drink that was goading on Marie’s candid rapport. She, meanwhile, requested another.

“I am homesick, I fear.”

“The state of many aboard this ship, I assume.”

“Do you ever miss the form our lives took in Washington? I suppose it is my turn to be frank. 1908 felt like the year we were betrothed. You had your children at the White House and I, mine; all on their high horses, but of sound morals and tender spirits.”

“You hate the President,” Marie observed bluntly.

“My God, I hate the President.”

“Mr. Taft could never fill Mr. Roosevelt’s shoes. We both knew this.”

“But we trusted him to follow in his steps, did we not?”

“We did, indeed.”

The two of us sat in silence for a spell, Marie eyeing me as I had her from afar. She complimented my suit and inquired whether I was receiving enough nourishment; should we request *hors d'oeuvres*?

“Are you mothering *me* now?” I inquired. “With no schoolchildren on your piano bench, is this how our old mannerisms are soldiering on?”

“Archibald, it’s almost supernatural to me that you keep conjuring up the language of child-rearing. I spent so much energy considering this very thing yesterday; does it read upon my face?”

“Not at all. But do tell me more, if you wish.” My heart raced. This was the precise way in which I yearned to see Marie unclothed.

“I simply wonder whether there is a difference between giving birth and caring devotedly for a child — in my case, many children — that were never truly mine.”

“I’ve pondered similarly. I have had so many wives. Many of whom have boasted mustaches greater than my own.”

“That’s quite a feat,” Marie chuckled. “Yours truly is a thing of wonder.”

“Thank you,” I replied. “You’ve still ample time to figure out if there is a difference between children of choice and birth.”

Her smile faded, subsuming loyalty. “I don’t know if I do. Ella remains a handful.”

“Women that are as strong-willed as she tend to fare well on their own,” I offered. “She should not be an impediment to your curiosity. Nor should Taft be to mine.”

Solemnly, she shook her head and ordered another beverage. “I love her greater than one does a child. That is my downfall.”



## Marie & Ella

I suppose the Major assumed he was being stealth when he lingered in the adjacent French restaurant, observing me drink a gin rickey for a great many minutes. Perhaps it was only I who felt this way, but it seemed as though Archie chronically overestimated his aptitude for discretion.

I cannot say that I faulted him for spying. Ella was so often by my side, deterring friendly greetings from friends and spontaneous encounters with strangers. Still, in some queer way, I missed having her nearby. The absence of her commentary in the café left me feeling empty even as I flooded myself with alcohol.

I was relieved when Archibald decided to approach me. He treasured filling the surrounding air with lofty thoughts, laughter, and the suggestive. It was a welcome balm, though one that affixed to my flesh a bit too searingly. Archibald seemed to be seeking something — something *from me*. A promise or exploration that, as the liquor flowed, I was in no state to determine.

I had never seen him seem so sullen. No amount of English aftershave, no sterling lapel pin, no elaborate illuminated walking stick could mask his pitiful state. I feared for him.

Likewise, I feared what he was attempting to ask of me.



## Thomson, Thomas, & John

By our third day at sea, looking in on Johnny at dawn and twilight had become a habit. I would read to him from *The Sea Fairies*; Thomas, meanwhile, would attempt to lift our companion's spirits by complimenting his physique and bravery — both to mixed success. Receiving such praise from an aging man of sound body and ravenous mind could leave one feeling like less of a human than John's disease did altogether. Before departing for the first class promenade, I retrieved a spare blanket from our friend's cabin's wardrobe.

When Thomas returned from Sodom the night prior — some third class lavatory that was already popular among male passengers for the perverse affairs that transpired there — he was groaning in agony. At some point between eleven o'clock in the evening and three o'clock in the morning, he had thrown out his back. Humbled but intent on transcending the injury, Thomas agreed to simmer down. We would keep close to John as we sailed

home. It was decided by Thomas that what all three of us needed most was respite that bordered on stagnation.

Thomas insisted upon remaining ever-doting. He sent twelve shillings down to the purser's office to rent three beechwood lounge chairs on A Deck's portside promenade, nearest John's accommodations. There they were, in a tidy row, beneath the sun that was breaking over the Atlantic. Name placards were affixed to each seat — *Mr. Thomson Beattie, Mr. Thomas Francis McCaffry, Mr. John Hugo Ross* — indicating that these were ours and ours alone. I took in a deep breath and hoped for the day, perhaps Sunday or Monday, when John would be able to accompany us into the open air. Without him, our family would crumble. To be considered successful, my rapport with Thomas required Johnny's charming quips. His etymologies. His effeminate hysteria. I feared uttering the wrong words with no one around to soothe their burn.

It felt heavenly to be off my feet. I sat, loosened the laces of my brogues, and leaned into the sunlight.

Thomas too reclined, allowing the business ledger and *Le Canadien* he was holding under his arm to tumble into his lap. Immediately, he began cross-referencing stock figures with his own writings and performing arithmetic calculations warranting a blackboard. If the sea before us propagated a sense of the immortal and the infinite, Thomas' bank trade instilled a sense of time's preciousness and the necessity of the rote. Generally, I admired the portability of his labor. Even on the Nile, he was keen to pick up a piece of slate and etch some figures onto a wall or side

street and then place the necessary telegram home to Union Bank the moment we reached a metropolitan area.

I, however, was wholly relieved of my duties. Haslam Land Company would not operate without me present. Many years ago, I made myself a promise that I would never sell land unless I could see it first. Mine was the strategy of the yeoman farmer. I must personally confirm that any tract was devoid of indigenous beings and that no wildlife would come under siege should I sell a parcel to a businessman desiring to raze it for a new factory. Fancy flattening a woodland, only to find tree stumps and the bloody remnants of an aloof dodo bird's once viable form! When I voiced this ideology to colleagues, they always treated it too tenderly. *Such a gentleman*, they'd say. *What a radical spirit*. But really, I was doing what any salesman would do: inspect the merchandise and take accountability for what is done with it. In their eyes, however, I remained a libertine.

“Where do you suppose he's taking that bottle of drink?” Thomas asked, not looking up from his ledger. The sea breeze flipped its pages chaotically, as though resenting my friend's zest for achievement. The man in question was strolling past us at a brisk pace. His shoes clicked. His buttocks strained against his pants with each step, rivaling a woman's bustle. He was around Thomas' age; stoic yet dressed for the theatre in formalwear. Against his forearm, he held a bottle of Heidsieck & Co Monopole Gout Americain, emerald and golden. He seemed familiar, a political character. *Hadn't he accompanied a dignitary to purchase land in 1907 or so? Might he have been the American who remarked on having never spent much time north of Virginia?* If so, his name was Arthur, Andrew, or something of that nature.

“Perhaps he *too* is entertaining,” I remarked.

“Ha! Oh, Thomson. Your sense of humor always wonders me.” Thomas always treated John’s and my earnest responses as though they were intentional jokes and puns. This way, he never had to be explicit in his paternal condescension. For him, there was nothing satisfying about the explicit. And thus, there was no sensuality to be found in frank gestures like Mr. Arthur-Andrew’s.

“I am aware that it has already been a great many years since I was last a young man,” Thomas began. “And that I’d be best suited to remain grateful to the lads who take interest — you and Johnny included. Though I must say, men like *that* deserve the fate of Oscar Wilde. Their gait is a gloat that masks their pathetic reality. I hate seeing an old man, his pants ironed thricefold and his hair maintained to not betray its recession, trying to behave as a schoolboy.”

“Thomas...”

“Do you know what that demeanor does to young men?”

I did not. I only knew the impact Thomas’ coarse aura had on boys. “I have not been truly young for a great many years. I cannot say,” I answered. I caught the eye of a steward and requested a bowl of broth. It was an unusually chilly April at sea.

“It repulses them. It makes them see the horrors of what is to come in their own lives. And I would be remiss if I did not share in their disgust. It is the masculine obligation to age naturally and proactively. Others, and especially the youth, can see through that man’s egregious embellishment.”

I did not reply, though Thomas' words rose in my own throat, causing the sensation of seasickness. His outbursts about his contemporaries were not infrequent, though as I approached forty years of age, I wondered if I would inherit his nasty principles. His loathe of men who embraced their final glimmers of youth reduced him to someone I could not stand. I contemplated checking up on John.

“Promise me you will never become like them as you grow old, Thomson. Promise me you'll never pretend a fading quality represents the totality of you.”

I took in the people, old and young, strolling the promenade before us. Every so often, the sea spray would catch us all. It did not seep past our clothing. Rather, the droplets lingered on our cheeks and throats, chilling with cold and stinging with salt.

“I promise, Thomas. I promise,” I said, not fully knowing what I was pledging apart from my continued allegiance to Mr. Thomas Francis McCaffry.

**Saturday, April 13, 1912**



## Marie & Ella

The chickens were thriving below deck, their combs and wattles growing rosier by the day. The ship's carpenter attributed their health to the humidity from the nearby boiler rooms. Chickens, he said, and their eggs, benefit from unbearably moist air.

I was learning so much from John, though none of it about his profession itself. As I sat in the reading and writing room later that afternoon, I recited all of the questions I'd held back during our journey below: *How did you become involved in such a trade? Is your family proud? Will you always consider yourself an Englishman? Will you continue to pursue becoming a father?*

After we first met, Ella remarked that she adored me because I could hold a conversation and so could she. The difference, Ella said, was that she talked about herself to entrance others and I — as though at a seance —

posed thoughtful inquiries, each individual responding in turn. Yet, as with John, I struggled to direct questions at a single individual; especially one I only just met. The act threatened to forge an intimacy for which I was unprepared. I also risked being asked my own enervating queries.

John was not the sole person tasked with teaching me things. In the reading and writing room, I picked up books and newspapers left by fellow travelers. In Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, I read of mass casualty and flamboyant desire. Resenting how the novella made me think of Archibald's dire straits, I moved on to *The New York Times*. But he was there, as well. The Presidential primary in Pennsylvania was front page news. "The Republican machine of the city and state, directed by Senator Penrose, will undergo its first real test in a Presidential primary," I mouthed aloud. "Senator Penrose has declared for Taft and most, if not all, of his leaders in this city and the state are favorable to the election of Taft delegates."

"Senator Penrose is an acromegalic child. He once borrowed my stallion for a weekend ride with a Congressional committee. The bastard cracked the horse's ribs with his heels. I could have shot him. I should have shot him."

I lowered the newspaper. There was Archie, lighting his pipe, sullyng the subdued atmosphere with talk and smoke.

"...Shot him and then myself." His smile contorted. He laughed.

I stood to meet him. "Hello, Archibald. Were you hesitating approaching me again?"

“Not at all. I simply became lost among the intricate furnishings. This might just be my favorite room in all of *Titanic*,” he mused. “Of the rooms I have managed to see, at least.”

“Likewise,” I admitted.

He considered the molding, the white walls and ceilings, the settees upholstered in velvet. “Have you ever seen anything like this before?”

“I have not.”

“Marry me, Marie.”

There was nothing I could say to escape this command that — absent never transpiring at all — should have been a soft, pragmatic inquiry. All my obsession over conversational questions failed to take into account the man who would rather *state* than *ask* his question!

My dress grew tight around my throat. “I have to sit down.”

We both did. Archie pulled out my chair before sitting opposite me, his chin resting in his palm.

“All those years ago, I was so happy,” Archibald reasoned. “It was as though every day was a new class in living well — which didn’t always make them joyful — though that sensation did keep me eager to rise. We were on the precipice of progress; of ensuring that Americans felt held by those in power.”

I nodded. “May I ask how that concerned me?”

“It did not, initially. Yet we then developed a rapport so effervescent, cultured, and *kind*,” he said, his eyes threatening to well at the final notion. “Eventually, I saw you — in some fashion or another — under the same roof

each day and night. Sometimes, freed of it entirely at the theatre or Woodward and Lothrop.”

“Our friendship was of another place. While it was full of joy and consistency, I no longer know how to return.” Amid this dual proposition and confession, I too felt gutted. It was damning how quickly time could pass, old delights becoming cuneiform etched on the mind’s walls. I would never feel as much of a mother or a wife — a woman, alive! — as I did during Roosevelt’s term.

“Move back to Washington,” he said, simply. “My townhome will be yours. You could give piano lessons to children in the parlor by day and host recitals by night. We would have our own floors. I would never ask anything of you that you are not designed to offer.”

“Save for leaving Ella.” My breath finally steadying, I stood once more.

“I cannot wed you, Archibald; even though it might be for convenience alone. At a different time, perhaps I would have accepted this...” my mind floundered for the word. He was demanding marriage more than proposing it. “...solicitation. And even then, the act might have very well have jeopardized the bliss we shared for those four hopeful years.”

I was overcome by the need to be beside Ella; to hold her eyes with mine and reaffirm that, while our circumstances were most uncanny and occasionally trying, we were content within them. Gathering my reading glasses and parasol, I made to depart the reading and writing room. It occurred to me that I may very well never see Archibald Butt again. I turned around.

“Archie?”

“Yes, Miss Young?”

“I have a favor to ask of you.”

“As you wish.”

“Please divorce Washington. I love you and I fear for you so. It has afforded you enough valor. Leave.”

“Do tell me more about valor. Having spent my career watching men perish means nothing. For were this ship to go under, you, my sweet Vaudeville act, would receive rescue accommodations as I sank to the ocean’s bottom. Tell me what you know of valor.” He did not look me in the eye. “I would very much like my walking stick returned. You may leave it at the purser’s office if you wish.”

I left him standing there, lost in the room’s indefinite silence.

Upon my return to our stateroom, I pardoned Nellie and Sante for the remaining daylight hours. Ella, exhausted by her resistance, had begun to comply with her bedrest orders. She was reading, her glasses positioned on the thickest part of her nose as she pored over a collection of poetry by Alice Dunbar Nelson, a Negro suffragist who had only recently abandoned New Orleans for Harlem. Ella was enraptured; throughout our trip in Paris, she spoke of inviting Alice to her next soiree at Briarcliff Lodge.

“Good afternoon, interloper,” she taunted gently.

“Nellie,” I called. “Help me from my dress before you depart.” Returning to the room with a single devoted nod, her hands moved as quickly as machinery across the mauve buttons lining my spine.

“Godspeed,” she whispered with a wink before leaving us be.

“Ella.”

“Marie.”

“I have something I must get off my chest.”

She looked at me over the frames of her spectacles, suspicious of any surprises occurring this late in a journey abroad. “So you *did* have an affair with the ghastly little girl writer on the Left Bank.”

“Ella, I am trying my best to be serious. Please afford me the dignity,” I pressed. “And while Miss Colette was *very* nice, I am quite pleased with my life as it is. Were this ship to go under tomorrow, I would die happy, as you would accompany me through the terror.”

“This seems unlikely. Must I perish, too?”

“You are a brute, Mrs. J. Stuart White. You not infrequently forget that I am neither grifter nor handmaiden, and yet I love you and you alone,” I said, crawling into bed with her, my dress still rustling around my ankles. “And once your leg heals, nothing will bring me more joy than strolling beside you once more. Being without you is the unholyest of sins.”

Her eyes began to well in a way I had not witnessed outside of the theatre. My love was beneath the blankets, warm and welcoming. I kissed her maimed ankle, journeying upward; I would have readily inhaled its infection. My mouth did not cease for what felt like a fortnight. Her belly caressed my cheek, illuminating me to her every soft whimper. At that pungent crux beneath her nightgown, Ella tasted and smelled of salt; of the ocean itself. She thrashed about, becoming one with the waves and snowcaps.

“What has happened to you today?” Ella asked, dazed, as evening drew near.

“Adrift at sea, my heart began to float,” I answered.



## Archibald

When I ventured to the ship's study to write Mother once more, I had no inkling of how the excursion would wick the little pride I still possessed from my body. If any emotion pervaded my foresight, it was a sense of delight at Marie sitting there, blonde and broad-shouldered, murmuring the news of the day. The magnetic pull of having once resided with her in the nation's Capitol seemed to have returned as we journeyed in tandem but not quite together across the Atlantic.

Old possibilities reignited and agitated me: dreams of shared dinners, retelling of love affairs among our own kind, and even the potential of creating a child. As she rejected me in her elegant, pitying way, it only served to remind me of why I fancied Marie's company so: she stood her ground like a man, all while speaking as a woman.

Standing there as she departed, I was taken back to the youth and the moods that pervaded the moments following confession. Both the reading and writing room and the cathedral possessed high, ornate ceilings that caught

the smallest of sounds — a sneeze, a sob — and returned it to its originator's ears moments later. An echo was little more than an auditory rejection; a cruel, red stamp atop an otherwise neutral or hopeful admission. I had once found the church as lonely as this beastly ship.

When nearing twelve, I went hunting with a son of my father's best friend. As we huddled in a treestand in Georgia's coastal plains, inhaling chiggers and swatting away mosquitoes, his hand found its way down my britches. I no longer berate myself for having not stopped him. Though I do frequently wonder how my life would have fallen in line had the encounter never happened at all.

Harvesting two six-point bucks the next morning did not quell my unease at having received pleasure from another, so off I went to confession.

*All timid retreats, Archie, result in exponential consequences.*

It was a lesson I'd learned then, but not taken to heart as greatly as I believed. My bravery in military battle could not eclipse my cowardice in romance. Marie and I would never experience shared lust and I knew better to pursue and disrupt her life so brazenly, in the hopes of acquiring an equally cowardly accomplice. Now, I have lost the totality of her for eternity.

That night, I went mad pacing my suite. I soon forgot about dinner and the amusing possibilities for my remaining days at sea. I rammed my precious rapier through an upholstered chair and placed bullets into the chamber of my revolver; the latter act felt as I imagine the insemination of a woman does; gratuitous and self-repulsing. I could no longer tell whether cowardice was the realm of the nobleman or the degenerate. Though I still felt certain that,

should I be the next recipient of my sword, I would much prefer to perish as the former.



## Thomson, Thomas, & John

After dinner, Thomas suggested we proceed to the smoking room for port, cigars, and to meet the acquaintance of his new companions. In the name of romanticism, I agreed to accompany him — but only if he would humor me by accompanying me to a sitting room on B Deck prior to our ascent into his self-devised Babylon. Thomas consented.

Since boarding, I'd hankered to take in the room's great many portraits from Ovid's "The Metamorphoses." Small and encased in square and oval frames, they lined each white wall. I searched until I found the one that had motivated this entire quest: a representation of the story of Iphis, the girl raised in secret as a boy and betrothed to another woman, Ianthe. Her true sex would certainly go undetected by fellow passengers uninitiated in Ovid; she was but a boy of good stature.

"He is beautiful," Thomas observed, unknowing.

Tears came to my eyes as I gazed upon my kindred spirit. Thomas slung his arm around my shoulder as I wept softly.

The young men with whom Thomas gallivanted admittedly offered pleasurable company, partially offsetting John's absence. Randolph, the slight weightlifter, inquired about my work in Winnipeg; Jeremiah, the tanned engineer whom Thomas had smuggled into first class accommodations that evening, was eager to charm me with tales of his childhood in Glasgow as an apprentice to Charles Rennie Mackintosh. It seemed that, wherever we voyaged, men of our sort bore the same traits. They were eager to please Thomas, and even more determined to impress John and myself; Randolph went so far as to offer to sit with John as we smoked our cigars down to their butts. Handsome though he was, I was most charmed by his generosity.

But it was Thomas who remained insufferable. He would eye me as though to ask if I was pleased by his tastes. Above all else, my friend wanted to be powerful, though said power relied less and less on his physique and more and more upon the opinions of others.

"When were you born?" Jeremiah asked me.

"In 1875, under the sign of Sagittarius," I replied.

Thomas clucked, plotting how to return himself to the helm of the conversation. "I just devised a universal theory of the Edwardian male," he said to our company. "Would you care to hear it?"

"Of course," Randolph acquiesced.

"Oh, please!" Jeremiah pleaded.

"Why not," I breathed.

He cleared his throat as though approaching a lectern. "Gentleman, I would like you to think of your current age."

"Twenty-two," declared Randolph.

“*Think* it, boy,” Thomas snapped, slamming his closed fist on the table. “Do not speak it.”

After a few minutes of silent meditation on our collective 130 years, he resumed moderation. “I firmly believe that, given the advances society is now experiencing — this fine vessel the least among them — that age forty is the formal beginning of the end of being young. Age sixty-five is the beginning of being old. In magazines for the fairer sex, I have noticed —”

“You read ladies’ literature?” I mocked, becoming as vile as he. I had no appetite during dinner. The port, little though I consumed, was swiftly recharging my viscera. Randolph, appreciating my joke, plugged his laughter with his cigar.

“As I was saying,” Thomas continued, “The ladies have taken to an inane rhetorical device to explain modern aging. ‘Twenty-five’ is the new fifteen,’ they boast. ‘Thirty-five is the new twenty-five.’ Naturally, this is fool’s wisdom. There is no way one can be two distinctly different ages at the same time. This must be the weakest gesture of the weaker sex to-date.”

“Mmm,” observed Jeremiah, taking in Thomas’ words as wisdom.

“I believe we, as contemporary men, are capable of achieving immortality if we adhere to these two simple facts. For if forty is the beginning of the final twenty-five years of being young, this is something which scientists and naturalists alike can conceive in their laboratories. So too can I. If I am forty-six, that means that I am in the final twenty-four years of being young. If Thomson here is thirty-six, that means he has how many years of youth left under his belt?”

“Thirty?” inquired Randolph.

“Oh come now, lads. Thomson, you deal with complex figures in your trade. Show them how it’s done. How many years of youth do you have left?”

I blunted my cigar in an ashtray and stood. “I would not know, Thomas. I would not know.”

I left the men to their drinks and their cumulative ninety-four years. I lay awake into the early morning, awaiting Thomas’ hand against our doorknob. It would not come.

**Sunday, April 14, 1912**



## Marie & Ella

The French had a term for what was abruptly transpiring between Ella and I: *Faire une partie de jambes en l'air*. The phenomenon extended beyond the boudoir and into the first class communal domain.

I encouraged Ella to violate the terms of her bedrest that morning to visit the chickens with me. Nude and resting her weight on the illuminating cane, Ella gave her body over to Nellie to dress. While it was thrilling to see her unclothed, after three days of nightgowns, I welcomed her dress and hat.

“You have certainly seen it all over the years,” Ella told Nellie as she slipped a chemise over her head.

“In the end, it makes you all the more human,” Nellie replied, a hairpin between her lips. “I enjoy taking part in these outings with you and Miss Young. They teach me so much about what it means to live.”

“I enjoy my excursions with Miss Young for very similar reasons.”

Ella insisted that John remove the smallest hen from the kennel for her to examine. Its wings pinned beneath Ella's torso and arm, she cradled it affectionately, cooing about the nice life the bird would have once we returned to Briarcliff Lodge. "All the land in the world," she said, as though the fowl were a racehorse. As the carpenter turned his back to return it to its crate, Ella pressed a finger to my lips. Unable to help myself, I bit its fingerprint.

As it was her first time encountering daylight since Wednesday, we took an extended stroll back to our quarters. Together, we wandered through lounges, restaurants, and quiet realms. I began to feel full of the drinks and food that crossed our gazes, even though neither of us had paused for sustenance. Being sequestered for so long had made Ella a bit fitful; she avoided the gazes of our fellow passengers and clung to her beloved new cane until her knuckles grew ashen. Noticing Archibald walking towards us with the businessman Clarence Moore, I directed us indoors again.

"I understand that I have been very cruel to you," she conceded on the Saloon Deck. "I would say that I meant nothing by it, but such dismissals are how bad habits are made. And I do not wish to be bad for you, Marie." Ella paused our stroll. "I wish to be the sweetest formation in your life."

I smiled. "You could not be sweet if you dipped yourself in a tub of maple syrup. You're much too acrid. Change your tone? *Of course*. But please never change who you are."

"I adore you," Ella said, offering me her hand.

"I worship you," I answered, accepting it.

It was much too early for passengers to find themselves in *Titanic's* reception room, for many — sloshed on champagne and spirits — had struggled to mount her Grand Staircase just hours before. Scuffs were now appearing in her English oak banisters from all the activity, and I noticed a hairpin trapped in the wrought iron railings. The affluent were well-mannered until they and they alone decided to revolt against their own standards. Such uprisings seemed to happen across the ship from ten o'clock at night until three o'clock in the morning.

Carefully, but much swifter than I expected, Ella descended the staircase with far more grace than those who ambled upward at twilight.

The light entering the domed glass ceiling above carried her down to me, as though she was being held upright by iridescent particles of fairy dust. The bronze cherub that clutched a torch above the staircase's final step commemorated Ella's descent. The sweet creases on inside its bronzed elbows reminded me of her own. A woman's body, I thought, was at its most divine when unrestricted by cloth and folded over onto itself a thousand times: at the belly, at the bosom, and even at the knee. In such a pose, the torso became a mountain, streaked and softened by time's weatherings. This was my sex as I knew it. No other posture would do.

Ella was the first to notice the colossal Steinway & Sons piano. Tucked into the starboard corner of the Jacobean reception area, it was the grandest of grands. Though versed in Steinway's glorious ivories, I did not recognize this one: it seemed to be their Model B, yet encased in a far finer wood with lavish etchings.

“Will you play ‘Enoch Arden’ for us?” Ella asked, faint of breath.

In early adulthood, I had sharpened my career's teeth on Strauss, the gifted egotist. His oeuvre served as an accompaniment not only to Tennyson's poetry, but my awakening to Eros as I now understood him.

"Oh, Ella," I sighed, knowing my protest was merely another manner of indulging in our aberrant dynamic; one which I largely succumbed to with joy. "It's a bit macabre for this pilgrimage, don't you think? All the foiled loves, the maritime travesties, the titular death?"

"Nay," Ella guffawed. "It makes me grateful for where we are." I was struck by her exhibition of greater faith in this nautical wonder than I.

"Moreover, Enoch is a hero and there are too few of those about this buoyant fortress," she growled. "The doctor with whom you abandoned me must have been of Hun ancestry."

"Ella, I —"

"I know, *I know*. 'Twas for my own good."

"I can only recall the first few stanzas from memory," I warned.

"That is more than enough," Ella said with a forgiving flap of her wrist that offered me yet another hint at the hearty summits beneath her dress.

Settling into a rattan chair beneath a parlor palm, she clasped her hands across her lap as she did at the opera, absent a newsprint program held between them. It had been years since my fingers alone were responsible for a performance; in most instances, I prespired in the front row of the auditorium, smelling salts nudged between my breasts, as a pupil made his or her debut. By the audience's standards, any wrong notes reflected poorly on they and they alone. Still, I absorbed every misguided sharp, extended rest, or poor hand positioning. To perform myself after all these years, even for a

lover, required a martyr's insanity. I wished for the comforting cool of the salts bottle against my bosom.

Spine straight and stomach taut, I played what I could recall; every note up until the moment the vocalist speaks Tennyson's words. *Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm.* Ella, eyes closed, mouthed the words until she too could recall no more.

"Thank you, dearest," she murmured, salt water trailing down her cheek. In the silence of the reception room, I kissed her face. There, I'd found my antidote.

Despite being on the mend, Ella was not above using her injury to her advantage. As evening burst forth, once more prone in bed, she buzzed the steward and requested the verboten, even for the ailing: a ten-course dinner, to be promptly delivered to the stateroom. With no room for reasoning left after the incentive of her gold coins, the gentleman departed for the galley.

He would return with one silver platter; a far cry from the feast we both yearned for after ravaging one another. "I regret to inform you that the kitchen has ceased operations for the evening," he acknowledged. "However, I am pleased to provide you with tomorrow evening's dessert, freshly made."

Enjoying the theatre of the moment, the steward removed the platter's lid. "For you both: Fresh peaches and Chartreuse jelly."

"Well done, lad," Ella smiled from bed, extending her hand to afford him additional compensation. After he departed, she beckoned me to bring myself and join her.

“Heavenly. Just heavenly!” Ella said as I offered her a spoonful. “You simply must try it.”

I reached for the utensil, but Ella stopped me. She pressed her finger against the plate and scooped up a sliver of the jelly, emerald and aromatic.

“Open.”

I obliged. Her finger remained inside me as I savored the sugared delight, pressing it about my mouth with my tongue. Suddenly and then all at once, it melted into liquid, foam-capped and churning.



## Archibald

*Seppuku*, the Japanese call it. The art of falling on one's sword. A blade clear through the intestines and one dies swiftly, largely of shock. In doing so, the practitioner reclaims the dignity that he has lost in life by exercising bravery and agency in death. The irony of my considering *seppuku* a viable manner to depart this world: I lacked the guts.



## Thomson, Thomas, & John

Three days away from home! I could have bellowed with joy as I rose that Sunday, reinvigorated by the simple idea of the Canadian soil that would soon be beneath my feet. By daybreak, I'd still seen neither hide nor hair of Thomas. I dressed and made my way up to Johnny, soon strutting with the realization that I would no longer be limited to the four suits in my steamer. In the Great North, options awaited me!

That morning, John was well enough to sprawl across me rather than curl into a minute ball to my right. Light though he was, I appreciated his body's weight on mine. It reminded me of summer; the way one would feel exhausted from work, but the accompanying ache would always be a pleasurable one.

"Did I tell you what Thomas said when he observed me purchasing *The Sea Fairies*?" I asked.

John shook his head.

“He said,” I began, puffing my lungs and lowering my voice. “My dear Thomson, it bears noting that my affinity for the youthful does not quite extend to the bassinet.” My chest heaved wildly, thrusting John up and down in waves. I feared nauseating him until I realized he was laughing, too.

“The bassinet, no. But it certainly rubs up against the varsity crew boat.”

“And the dunce cap. Remember Georgie?”

“I do not know how you have kept up with him all these years,” John conceded.

“You think too well of me. I have not seen the beautiful bastard since yesterday eve...”

His eyes grew wide. “Is that so?”

“Now where were we?” I asked, thumbing through the chapters. So precious was I, endeavoring to not dog-ear the book’s pages.

“The Magic of the Mermaids,” he yawned.

“Ah yes! Chapter 15. The Magic of the Mermaids!”

I found our old spot. “‘But we will have to break out of the castle, in some way,’ observed Cap’n Bill. ‘That will not be difficult,’ answered Aquareine. ‘It will be no trouble for me to shatter one of these panes of glass, allowing us to pass out and swim straight up to the top of the dome.’ ‘Let’s do it now!’ said Trot, eagerly. ‘No, my dear; we must wait for a good opportunity, when we are not watched closely. We do not wish the terrible Zog to thwart our plan,’ answered the Queen, gently.”

After kissing John's hairline and tucking him in, I desired to revisit the sitting room myself to take in the portraits, free of the constraints of my own Zog.

Once more, I singled out the Book IX image. Painted in the style of the Renaissance, Iphis — born female but masquerading as a man to please her father — stands cheek to cheek with his unknowing wife Ianthe as they wed. Hymenaios, Juno, and Venus flank them, celebrating the virtuous union.

I moved closer still, realizing an error in the napkin-sized masterpiece. With the aid of his mother Telethusa, Iphis was transformed into a true male by Isis ahead of marriage. Yet in the portrait, he remained uniquely feminine yet dressed in male ceremonial garments; his hips sloping outward as his waist flexed inward. The artist, whomever he or she was, was either unfamiliar with the epic or sending a deliberate and scandalous message through the canvas' subtleties: here were two women together as one, blessed by Venus.

Almost abruptly, this realization soured me to Thomas. He had distracted me from this pleasurable realization the night prior. Then, he blotted out any remaining memory of the visual encounter with the night's disastrous antics. *Had I no sense of self around him any longer?* Thomas' persistent waxings on how men should be at every age were intolerable, but the unknown artist's work pushed me to loathe the man to his core; no thread of his entire being was omitted from this newly realized ire. I would be done with him upon our return to Winnipeg.

Twice more, I looked upon the two feminine figures. Once to witness them. And again to comprehend their context among a series of fifteen

paintings; one for each book in *The Metamorphoses*. There was something to be said for beauty that does not flaunt itself, but is at ease enough to blend into the masses and await the one person who — open chested and patient — decides to take a second look. This artist comprehended such subtleties; the small sleights of hand that can connect one person to others and deeper still to himself. His fate, his legacies, and his lores.

With that thought spiraling down my spine, I realized Thomas would never know such a wonder. My body folded onto the floor. I wept for him.

**Monday, April 15, 1912**



## Archibald

This nautical crisis is a victory for me, you see. I am no seaman but I am an apt soldier — one capable of wading through shallow waters. Until she was taken under, I would be of use to my fellow men. As it is remarked in 1 Corinthians, the resurrection of the dead is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

This is how I would be reborn; no wives or professional upheavals required.

I dealt cards with several men with similar apathies for mortal life until the clock struck one, at which point we all journeyed to the Boat Deck to survey goings on. I visited Marie's cabin, relieved to find nary a soul. I took it upon myself to block men attempting to enter lifeboats ahead of maids and oarsmen. Revealing my revolver, I instructed a spritely engineer to release

the animals from their kennels below. A surge of beasts arrived on deck, as though the ill-fated ship was enacting an inverted recounting of Noah's ark.

The equine canine I'd seen days prior galloped across the smooth wood planks, splashing the encroaching sea water onto gallant fellows too preoccupied with saving our women from the broader aquatic threat. He bolted up to Miss Ann, his mistress, lapping at her face as she planned to board an escape vessel. Denied entrance into the boat, she simply disembarked to remain on deck with him. The gesture brought tears to my eyes.

Nearby, chickens flapped their underdeveloped wings, hoping to soar to land that simply did not exist; cocks emitted horrific crows. Moving quickly, I grabbed an airedale terrier by its scruff and deposited it into the arms of Mr. Astor, who had just nudged his wife through their cabin window into Lifeboat Four.

"You always have a gift in tow when you visit, Archibald," he remarked, allowing the pup to burrow near to his chest for warmth.

"My mother's guidance," I said in truth.

"Funny how this end is thrilling as its beginning."

"Yes," I said.

Walking toward the ship's impressive aft, I checked my revolver's chamber, raised it to my breast, and pulled the trigger.



## Thomson, Thomas, & John

A steward roused me from my dreams just after the stroke of midnight. As I came to, my nocturnal visions of sirens and sea serpents remained, affording the anxious fellow before me gleaming purple gills and a finely barbed tail.

“To the Boat Deck, at once!” the steward stammered, shoving a lifevest into my arms. Dazed, I threw on the first clothing that met my fumbling hands — a white dinner coat, and a pair of trousers far too thin for the frigid night; in my haste, long johns eluded me. Gazing out our window onto the illuminated dock, I could see nothing save the mechanical crane. Thomas was nowhere to be found. He was as enterprising as they come. I would have to trust him to find the way.

“Please, sir. Can you confirm that passengers are being informed on A Deck? My dearest is lodging there.”

“Aye, Mr. Beattie.”

As I ascended, I observed stray items — a medicine ball, a child's toy engine, a cocktail glass — roll across the floor as though pulled by an invisible magnet toward *Titanic's* bow. Could it be possible that she, the Greek deity preceding the Olympians in seniority, was floundering? Unthinkable.

Should it indeed be the case, it would be the cruelest irony: to be so close to home — so close to resolving my every woe — only to be stalled near Scotland? Greenland? Where on earth were we, apart from the big old blue?

Above deck, I was greeted by the placidity of the underworld. The elite of American and British stock seemed unflapped by this witching hour development. The women of first class entered boats suspended by the finest of cables without so much as a whimper regarding the biting cold into which they descended by crank. In a great many instances, small children were enveloped in the arms of the maids which followed them.

I strapped on my life preserver and, like the remaining men, waited my turn, a cigar wedged into my jaw. I did not understand my kind. I wished to be Iphis, sexed by my actions and not by my flesh. At least then I would be guaranteed safe passage.

As the vessel groaned and her lights faded, an unease grew among the men in my midst. Some bargained with engineers for a seat aboard a lifeboat, attesting to their exemplary rowing skills, honed decades earlier in boarding school. Others begged without decorum, inciting several scuffles. With increasing urgency, I scanned the growing crowd in search of Johnny. I prayed for Charlie, Stephen, that horrid green stretcher, and thought of Mother Goose.

*Rock-a-bye, baby, in the treetop  
When the wind blows, the cradle will rock  
When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall  
And down will come baby, cradle and all*

*When the bow breaks.* The ship began to tilt forward, the angle widening with each passing moment. Water would soon strike my feet.

I reached several crewmen and passengers who were feasting on scraps. On Titanic's starboard side, a lifeboat, smaller but structurally sound was discarded during the boardings, its upper still firmly caught in the jaws of a pulley. Struggling, we released her and brought her to the aft of the boat for lowering. We would have to jump a remarkable ten feet to land within it and then exercise caution to not incite a capsized. I knew the cold; as did Johnny and Thomas. A man of formidable size would last no longer than thirty minutes in the Atlantic's ice waters.

My escape was halted as I spotted him on the ship's opposing side, peering over a railing as the stern rose into the air.

"Thomas!" I cried. "Come! Quickly!"

He turned around, as calm as the men who had since been reduced to groveling. He wore pajamas and little else. There was no preserver around his chest. I contemplated throwing him my own.

"Ah, Thomson. Fancy seeing you here," he replied. "Impeccable timing, really. I have something important to tell you. Those thoughts of mine about aging, you found them foolish, yes?"

"Thomas, what are you waiting for? Come!"

“You did, yes?”

“Yes! Now please come on,” I pleaded, my fellow men nudging me into our little boat.

“I now do, as well.”

“Whatever are you talking about?”

“I now believe my assertion that forty is the beginning of the final twenty-five years of being young,” he said, climbing over the railing, “to be an egregious lie based on bad information.” Without lingering to hear my response, he leapt.

And with that, Thomas Francis McCaffry as I knew him slipped from my sight forever.



## Marie & Ella

The stewards and engineers left us to our own fate. There was no knock at our cabin door to encourage us to rush us into one of the first lifeboats that departed *Titanic*'s comforts. I was fortunate that Ella roused me when she heard a strange noise she compared to loose marbles. In the haste to dress well for the elements and ensure Ella had her cane before seeing exactly what had transpired, I'd left behind my coin purse and passport. It was only then, after roaming the first class decks, that we were ushered into a lifeboat.

“My poor Sante. My poor birds,” Ella sobbed to Nellie, who silently enveloped her in a maternal embrace. Sitting continued to bring her too much pain. As our intended vessel home faded from view, Ella opted to stand and bark orders at the few men at our lifeboat's oars. While her treatment of the lower classes peeved me, this marked the first instance in which it was justified. Rather than ensuring we were a safe distance from the suction that was dragging *Titanic* and everything near her underwater, our masculine

mates, all defecting stewards, were content to smoke and talk amongst themselves. Whatever had become of my dear John, I wondered.

While none of us were certain that the direction in which we rowed — a vague light in the distance the Captain asserted was another liner — would ensure the safest passage, the women among us were insistent upon keeping our bodies in motion. Movement meant expediting the time between disaster and rescue; it also meant that our muscles would burn with heat more than the cold of the surrounding waters.

Ella pointed her illuminated cane accusationally. “ROW, you impotent navel!” She charged at the able seaman tasked with our boat. The Countess of Rothes, her dress’ sleeves torn and rolled up past her elbows, took charge of the tiller, steadily guiding us in the direction of the light. I, along with a stoic woman from Brooklyn, manned the rear oars. Her stamina greater than mine, I had to pass off duties as I retched over the boat’s side. Throughout, Ella remained standing on her afflicted leg and clutching her torch. She resembled a queer Lady Liberty, I thought to myself. Lesvos seemed to be an island of one’s own conjuring; we twenty-two female survivors had repatriated her and were already creating our own economy of harrowing tales, pocketed candies, and sheer will. When we heard the explosions and cries of passengers as *Titanic* went under, I did not dare look over my shoulder. This was not the time for mourning. The ship we were approaching had vanished, or perhaps it was never a boat to begin with; just an aquamarine mirage, playing tricks on the lot of us.

As the sky cleared with the promise of dawn, the sea around us entered a state of haunting silence, not to be broken by songbirds or the aromas of

breakfast. Huddled around one another for warmth, we observed the beech deck chairs floating around us. As five o'clock neared, we passed a woman floating frozen solid in the ocean, her arms wrapped about the throat of a mammal so large that it must have been a pony. Perhaps I'd been wrong in my assertion that there were no horses aboard RMS *Titanic*; it was possible that Archie had been appropriately dressed for dinner all along. *And where was he?* I knew without inquiring. As anyone who has been worn ragged by politics can attest, myself included, I felt confident in my estimation: the man would take death before returning to Washington.

Daring not to breathe lest we incited a collective crying jag among our ill-fated peers, a foghorn broke the silence for us. In the distance, a steamer increased speed, cutting through the sea as it shortened the distance between our weary bodies and sanctuary.

**Thursday, May 2, 1912**



## Marie & Ella

On the twelfth day of the United States Senate inquiry into the sinking of RMS *Titanic*, it was determined that Ella would stand and entertain questions from the committee chairman, Senator William Alden Smith. In advance of her testimony, I sent a note to Alden, a devoted follower of Teddy Roosevelt whose acquaintance I had made through Archie many seasons earlier, requesting he consider exercising kindness toward my friend.

In the days leading up to the inquiry, Nellie assisted Ella in obtaining a new dress suit appropriate for her first political affair; I took it upon myself to purchase her a new eyeglasses case, embossed with *Mrs. Ella White, RMS Titanic Survivor, April 15, 1912*. I never wanted her to forget what her life meant to me.

In the high-ceilinged ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria, Ella was perched before swaths of newspapermen and Congressmen who would cling to her every word. As she removed spectacles from her purse, I grasped Nellie's hand, my nervous constitution getting the best of me.

The Senator paced as Ella was sworn in. “Do you make the Waldorf-Astoria your permanent home, Mrs. White?” He thundered.

My darling cleared her throat. “My home really is Briarcliff Manor, New York. That is my summer house. When I am in New York, I am always here at the Waldorf-Astoria.”

“I want to ask one or two questions, Mrs. White, and let you answer them in your own way. You were a passenger on the *Titanic*?”

“Yes.”

“Where did you get aboard the ship?”

“At Cherbourg.”

“Where were your apartments on the *Titanic*? What deck were you on?”

“We were on Deck C.”

“Do you remember the number of the room?”

“I do not believe I could tell you with any degree of certainty at all. Miss Young and my maid could tell you.” Ella nodded in our direction. A great many sets of eyes turned to appraise us.

“Miss Young or your maid would know the number of your room?”

“Yes. I never went out of my room from the time I went into it,” Ella bluffed, once more looking in our direction. We’d rehearsed her responses in our parlor to ensure authentic delivery. Over dinner, an agreement had been made: tell them what they needed to know about the steamer itself; everything else was for the gossips. “I never went outside of the door until I came off the night of the collision.”

“That was due, I believe, to a little accident you had on entering the ship?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You went directly to your apartment and remained there?”

“I remained in my room until I came out that night. I never took a step from my bed until that night.”

“Were you aroused especially by the impact?”

“No, not at all. I was just sitting on the bed, just ready to turn the lights out. It did not seem to me that there was any very great impact at all. It was just as though we went over a thousand marbles. There was nothing terrifying about it at all.”

“Were you aroused by any one of the ship’s officers or crew?”

“No.”

“Do you know whether there was any alarm turned on for the passengers?”

“We heard no alarm whatsoever. We went immediately on deck ourselves.”

“You went on deck?”

“We went right on deck ourselves.”

“On the upper deck?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Miss Young and your maid were with you?”

“Yes, and my manservant.”

“What were they doing then?”

“Simply all standing around.”

“Was anything being done about the lifeboats?”

“No. We were all standing around inside, waiting to know what the result was.”

“The lifeboats had not been cleared?”

“Nothing had been said about the lifeboats in any way, when suddenly Captain Smith came down the stairway and ordered us all to put on our life preservers, which we did. We stood around for another twenty minutes then, I should think.”

“*Still* on that deck?”

“No, on Deck B.” I could tell Ella was growing fatigued with the Senator’s performance.

“You went down to Deck B?”

“Yes, he said we must go back again, then, to Deck A, which we did, to get into the boats.”

“Where did you enter the lifeboat?”

“I entered the lifeboat from the top deck where the boats were. We had to enter the boat there. There was no other deck to the steamer except the top deck. It was a perfect rat trap. There was no other deck that was open at all.”

“Do you recollect which boat you entered?”

“Boat 8. The second boat off.”

“On which side of the ship?”

Ella sighed. “I could not tell you. It was the side going this way — the left side, as we were going.”

“That would be the port side.”

“Yes. I got in the second boat that was lowered.”

“What officer stood there?”

“I could not tell you that. I have no idea.”

“What officer supervised the work?” He repeated.

“I have no idea. I could not even tell whether it was an officer or the captain. I know we were told to get into the boat.”

“Did you have any difficulty getting into the boat?”

She blushed. “None whatsoever! They handled me very carefully, because I could hardly step. They lifted me in very carefully and very nicely.”

“How far out from the side of the ship did the lifeboat hang? Were you able to step into it?”

“Oh yes.”

“Or were you passed into it?”

“Why is he behaving as though Mrs. Ella is a legless fool?” Nellie whispered.

“Politics,” I whispered back.

“No, we stepped into it. It did not hang far out,” Ella replied.

“Did you see how far out it was?”

“No, sir. I have no idea. We got into it very easily, without any inconvenience whatsoever. As I said, my condition was such that I had to be handled rather carefully and there was no inconvenience at all.”

“Did you see anything after the accident bearing upon the discipline of the officers, crew, or their conduct which you desire to speak of?”

“Yes, lots about them,” she scoffed.

“Tell me about that.”

“For instance, before we cut loose from the ship two of the seamen with us — *the men*, I should say. I do not call them seamen. I think they were dining room stewards. Before we were cut loose from the ship they took out cigarettes and lighted them on an occasion like that! That is one thing that we saw. All of those men escaped under the pretense of being oarsmen. The man who rowed me took his oar and rowed all over the boat in every direction. I said to him, ‘Why don’t you put the oar in the oarlock?’ He said, ‘I never had an oar in my hand before.’ I spoke to the other man and he said, ‘I have never had an oar in my hand before, but I think I can row.’ Those were the men that were put to sea with us that night — with all these magnificent fellows left on board, those who would have been such a protection to us. Those were the kind of men with whom we were put out to sea that night.”

“How many were there in your boat?”

“There were twenty-two women and four men.”

“None of the men seemed to understand the management of a boat?”

“Yes, there was one there. One who was supposed to be a seaman, up at the end of our boat, who gave the orders.”

“Do you know who he was?”

“No. I do not know. I do not know the names of any of *those men*. But he seemed to know something about it.”

“I wish you would describe, as nearly as you can, just what took place after your lifeboat got away from the *Titanic*.”

“What took place between the passengers and the seamen?”

“We simply rowed away. We had the order, on leaving the ship, to do that. The officer who put us in the boat — I do not know who he was — gave strict orders to the seamen, or the men, to make for the light opposite and land the passengers and get back just as soon as possible. That was the light that everybody saw in the distance.”

“Did you see it?”

“Yes, I saw it distinctly.”

“What was it?”

“It was a boat of some kind.”

“How far away was it?”

“Oh, it was ten miles away. But we could see it distinctly. There was no doubt that it was a boat. But we rowed, and rowed, and rowed, and then we all suggested that it was simply impossible for us to get to it; that we never could get to it, and the thing to do was to go back and see what we could do for the others. We only had twenty-two in our boat. Then we turned and went back, and lingered around there for a long time, trying to locate the other boats, but we could not locate them except by hearing them. The only way they could locate us was by my electric lamp. The lamp on the boat was absolutely worth nothing. They tinkered with it all along, but they could not get it in shape. I had an electric cane — a cane with an electric light in it — and that was the only light we had. We sat there for a long time and we saw the ship go down, distinctly.”

“What was your impression of it as it went down?”

“It was something dreadful,” Ella said, pausing to retrieve a handkerchief from her purse. “Nobody ever thought the ship was going

down. I do not think there was a person that night. I do not think there was a man on the boat who thought the ship was going down. They speak of the bravery of the men. I do not think there was any particular bravery because none of the men thought it was going down. If they had thought the ship was going down, they would have frivoled as they did about it. Some of them said, 'When you come back you will need a pass,' and 'You cannot get on tomorrow morning without a pass.' They never would have had said these things if anybody had any idea that the ship was going to sink. In my opinion the ship, when it went down, was broken in two. I think very probably it broke in two. I heard four distinct explosions, which we supposed were the boilers. Of course, we did not know anything about it."

"How loud were those explosions?"

"Oh, they were tremendous. We did what we were ordered to do. We went toward the light. That seemed to be the verdict of everybody in the boat. We had strict orders to do that from the officer or whomever started us off — land the passengers and come right back for the others. We all supposed that boat was coming toward us, on account of all the rockets that we had sent up."

"Did you urge the man in charge of your lifeboat to go back?"

"One of us did."

"Did you urge him to go back to seek to pick up more people?"

"Not until we had gone out for half an hour and found it perfectly useless to attempt to reach that boat or that light. Then everybody suggested going back and we did too, but we could not."

"You went back?"

“Yes. The sailor changed our course and tried to go back. That was after trying to reach that light for three-quarters of an hour. It was evidently impossible to reach it. It seemed to be going in the same direction in which we were going, and made no headway toward it at all. Then we turned and tried to go back.”

“Did anybody try to get in or get out of your boat?”

“No,” Ella answered flatly.

“Did you land alongside the *Carpathia* with the same party with which you started from the Boat Deck of the *Titanic*?”

“Exactly.”

“You all landed safely?”

“We all landed safely. We had a great deal of trouble, but we all landed safely.”

“How many were there in your party?”

“Three. Miss Young, myself, and my maid. My valet was lost.”

“Did you make any attempts to communicate with your friends after you got aboard the *Carpathia*, by wireless or otherwise?”

“That was the first thing we did.”

“No, we did not succeed. They never received the telegram until last Monday night in this hotel. They took our telegram first thing when we got on board the *Carpathia* Monday morning. They took our Maconigram. I think the people on land had a much more serious time than we had so far as real suffering was concerned.”

“Will you describe what you saw after daybreak with regard to ice or icebergs?”

“We saw one iceberg in front of us. Of course, we could not see it because I was not facing it. I did not even see the *Carpathia* until my attention was called to her. I stood up all night long because I could not get up onto the seats which were very high, on account of my foot being bound up. I had no strength in my foot and I stood all night long. After we got aboard the *Carpathia*, we could see thirteen icebergs and forty-five miles of floating ice, distinctly, right around us in every direction. Everybody knew we were in the vicinity of icebergs. Even in our staterooms it was so cold that we could not leave the porthole open. It was terribly cold. I made the remark to Miss Young on Sunday morning that we must be very near icebergs to have such cold weather as that. It was unusually cold. It was a careless, reckless thing. It seems almost useless to speak of it. No one was frightened on the ship. There was no panic. I insisted on Miss Young getting into something warm. And I got into something warm. And then we locked our trunks and bags and went on deck. There was no excitement whatever. Nobody seemed frightened. Nobody was panic-stricken. There was a lot of *pathos* when husband and wives kissed each other goodbye, of course. We were the second boat pushed away from the ship and we saw nothing that happened after that. We were not near enough. We heard the yells of the steerage passengers as they went down, but we saw none of the harrowing part of it all.”

I observed Ella's rage being stoked as she considered any existing omissions from her testimony. Letting the memories guide her, she spoke a final time. “As I have said before, the men in our boat were *anything* but seamen, with the exception of one man. The women all rowed, every one of

them. Miss Young rowed every mile. The men could not row. They did not know the first thing about it. Miss Swift, from Brooklyn, rowed every mile, from the steamer to the *Carpathia*. Miss Young rowed every minute also, except for when she was throwing up, which she did six or seven times. Countess Rothe stood at the tiller. Where would we have been if it had not been for our women, with such men as that put in charge of our boat? Our head seaman would give an order and those men who knew nothing about the handling of a boat would say, 'If you don't stop talking through that hole in your face there will be one less in the boat.' We were in the hands of men of that kind. I settled two or three fights between them and quieted them down. Imagine getting right out there and taking out a pipe and filling it and standing there smoking, with the women rowing, which was most dangerous. We had woolen rugs all around us. Another thing which I think is a disgraceful point is that the men were asked when they got into the boat if they could row. Imagine asking men that are supposed to be at the head of lifeboats — imagine asking them if they can row! There is another point that has never been brought out in regard to this accident and that is that the steamer had no open decks except the top deck. How could they fill the lifeboats properly? They could not lower a lifeboat seventy feet with any degree of safety with more than twenty people in it. Where were they going to get any more in them on the way down? There were no other open decks. Just to think that on a beautiful starlit night — you could see the stars reflected in the water — with all those Marconi warnings, that they would allow such an accident to happen, with such a terrible loss of life and property. It is simply unbearable, I think."

“There were no male passengers in your boat?”

“Not one.”

“Do you know who any of the other women were in your boat?”

“Mrs. Kenyon, Mrs. Dr. Leder, of Brooklyn; Mrs. Swift, the Countess Rothe, her maid, Miss Young, my maid, and myself. I did not know any other ladies. Those were the ladies right around me. I never saw a finer body of men in my life than the male passengers on this trip — athletes and men of sense — and if they had been permitted to enter these lifeboats with their families, the boats would have been appropriately manned and many more lives would have been saved; instead of allowing the stewards to get in the boats and save their lives, under the pretense they could row when they knew nothing whatever about it.”

“I am very much obliged to you for your statement, Mrs. White.” the Senator finally stated.

As Ella stood to leave the podium and Ella and I sprinted to meet her, my heart swelled with pride. At the same time, I wanted to ask her how she did it — I could have never! What incantations had she recited just before taking the stand? Which Bible verses were emitted from her lips?

Then, I saw it: Archie Butt’s cane, clutched in her right hand. Her leg had long since healed, but the cure remained; an electric antidote, awaiting Ella’s next trials and tribulations.

“Marie, what time is it?” Ella inquired as the room emptied.

“Half-past six.”

“Take me to the opera at once. I must rinse the sound of my own voice from my ears with the help of Louise Homer. How tiresome that was!”

**Thursday, May 2, 1912**



## Marie & Ella

In early May, Ella returned to Briarcliff from a trip to Maine with Nellie. She entered our home a heaving whirlwind, eager to divulge something the moment Nellie took her coat.

“Marie darling, you would never guess the rumors swirling about you up north,” she exhaled before pulling my cheek to her lips, then my lips to hers. She tasted of saltwater taffy, the one dyed yellow.

“I wish you wouldn’t do that. You know it makes me ill.”

“Oh, do not be silly, it’s *very flattering*. Go on, have a guess!”

“May I have a clue?”

“A clue? Ha!” Ella crackled, banging her electric cane on the parquet flooring. She waited. “That was it, you idiot savant.” She banged the walking stick once more.

“Archie?”

Ella nodded. “Correct.”

“Oh dear,” I said, taking a seat. “I am so sorry I failed to tell you, but —”

“— There’s a touching story going around that Major Butt —,” she began, taking a seat beside me on the foyer chaise.

“— on the voyage home, Archibald —”

“— placed you in a lifeboat with a kiss on your forehead.”

“— proposed to me.”

Ella eyed me over the rims of her glasses, pushing them back up the bridge of her nose once her survey was complete. “I know for a fact that one of these hyperbolic anecdotes is certifiably false. I witnessed you flop into that lifeboat like a freshly caught trout myself. I do hope the other is a falsity, as well!”

“I did not know if it would ever serve any purpose to inform you. Archibald is dead and you are —”

“— still very much here,” Ella said knowingly. She took my hand to her throat and placed my fingertips on her pulse. “Am I worthy of knowing the whole of you, Marie?”

I nodded, ashamed. “I apologize. I should have told you after we sorted things out.”

“Yes, the peaches would have appreciated it. So would have I.”

I reddened and sought her bosom to conceal my face.

“That being said, you really should correspond with the Administration before this enters history as fact. The rumor has been committed to more than whispers,” she suggested, nodding to the *Washington Herald* on the end table.

“And no more lies or obfuscations!”

“No more. I promise you.”

Reading the article in question, I knew I had no choice. I would have to write Taft. I'd avoided thinking about Archibald after we returned home, which partially motivated my omission of his proposition. But the fact of the matter was, it still pained me to see him so unmoored during those final days. I did not know if I would ever have such a discreet and challenging man as a friend ever again.

The congratulatory mail began arriving by nightfall. After dinner, I reached for my pen.

Briarcliff Lodge

Briarcliff Manor

New York

May 10, 1912

President William H. Taft

Dear Mr. President:

I have read an account of the memorial service held in Washington recently in honor of Major Archibald Butt, at which service the Secretary of War alluded to a farewell conversation between Major Butt and myself. Had such a conversation supposed to

have taken place I should not have delayed one hour in giving you every detail of the last hours of your special aide and friend.

Although a Washingtonian I did not know Major Butt, having been in deep mourning for several years. The alleged 'interview' is entirely an invention, by some officious reporter; who thereby brought much distress to Major Butt's near relatives and friends... for when they wrote me of what a comfort the story was to them, I had to tell them it was untrue, as no such deception could be carried through.

They wrote me that through Mrs. Sloan's kindness, they obtained my address... and I immediately wrote Mrs. Sloan that there was no truth in this newspaper story.

When I last saw Major Butt, he was walking on deck, with Mr. Clarence Moore, on Sunday afternoon.

With deep regret that I could not be his messenger to you, believe me.

Very sincerely yours,

(Miss) Marie G. Young

**Thursday, May 2, 1912**



## Thomson, Thomas, & John

They found my corpse on Friday the thirteenth. I was right where I'd left myself: tucked into the flimsy planks comprising Collapsible A. In mortal death, Thomas would have been ever so proud of me. My traveling companions were two of the ship's firemen, soot-covered and sinewy, at least until their flesh began sun-rotting away. The curious thing about my death is the omnipresence of the elements: had the cold not taken me, the emerging summer sun certainly would have claimed me; and if not he, the over-prevalence of the wrong sort of water.

Though the rescue ships spotted our boat, they allowed us to drift until *Oceanic*, crossing the Atlantic with time to spare, decided it was time for our trio to receive a proper burial. Once more, Thomas would have been pleased. Boarding our wretched dinghy was Shane Leslie, a balding Irishman with a well-chiseled expression. In this state, I felt caught with my trousers down, even as I remained fully clothed. Shane rifled through our pockets for clues to our identities. I wished to scream as he wrote down the term 'niggerish' to

describe my decomposed state; it was an insult to my vanity and a great many men I loved when both arms were still socketed to my shoulders. Now, I am a ghost; a spectre composed of the dust of memories, the most recent ones the most closely held. I would do anything to recall life before *Titanic* as pointedly. I imagine the public feels similarly, all while helplessly feasting on our misfortune. I understand their affinity for masochism. I truly do.

Shane bagged me, piece by piece, and flung me overboard. In my vessel were stones from *Oceanic*, intended to hold me down. I sank at the speed of the steamer.

But the bag could not hold me, and soon I rose through the rucksack material, a spiral of fins and bubbles. Two ends of a tail developed where my feet once were. I no longer had knees, atrophied or otherwise. Air filled my lungs, or whatever had replaced them, and I held onto that orb of oxygen for hours. I would never breach the surface again.

Further and further down I swam. Through schools of fish of which I'd never dreamed. Beyond the bent steel and devastation. And there, beneath the Grand Staircase, I found Johnny and Thomson sharing a tin of caviar from the galley: each one dipping a webbed finger into the container before passing it back to the other. It had been months since I'd last witnessed John take in any food at all — and now, a luxurious one.

“Thomson!” Thomas bellowed in his new voice. “Come. We have much to discuss.”

“We do,” I said cautiously, bubbles emitting from my mouth. I sounded queer, like a moose capable of enuciation. “We do,” I repeated, embracing it all.

**Sunday, September 15**



## Marie & Ella

The papers were my favorite part of visiting New York City with Ella on the weekends. They were always in motion: being tossed about by grubby-faced newsboys, flapping in the warm autumn air near the newsstands. I would pick up *The New York Times* for posterity, *New York Sunday* news for the immediacy, and *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* for Djuna Barnes' impeccable wit.

On the Sunday my essay — painstakingly written per Ella's urging — was to appear in *National Magazine*, I could not bring myself to leave bed to complete my little routine of fetching papers from the children on Fifth Avenue. I feared seeing my words or — worse — my face on the cover at a newsstand or in a tiny boy's hands. Surely it would elicit the same response as seeing your reflection in a public mirror without being entirely prepared for it.

“Quiet! It is a majestic piece,” Ella muttered, rolling over. She groped the nightstand for her spectacles. “‘Lest We Forget’ is a thorough title. And the passage, oh what was it you’d written... ‘Who can forget the cruel changes in the faces of those who waved gay farewells as the tender left the French harbor, and ‘era they again sighted land, had yielded all up that made life beautiful to them?’... it still leaves me breathless.”

Calling Nellie, she nudged me from bed with her perfectly healed leg.

“My favorite thing about you is that you always find a way to tell the truth,” I said.

“My favorite thing about you is your grace, Grice.”

I dressed and entered the streets, silent but for the papers being rustled and the church bells tolling. Amid the ruddy-faced boys, I was surprised and almost scandalized to discover a ruddy-faced girl, clutching a stack of periodicals. I stooped down to meet her eye.

“What’s your name?”

“Gertrude.”

“A lovely name for a young sprite like yourself. A strong one, too.” I held my breath. “May I have one *National Magazine*, please?”

“Yes ma’am,” she replied with a chirp as she rifled through her wares.

“What do you want to be when you grow up, Gertrude?”

“A swimmer,” she said with much immediacy. “I want to swim the English Channel when I’m older. I want to make a world record.”

“Very good,” I said, taking the paper and handing her payment and a few extra coins. “I’m not a big fan of water myself, but I believe you can accomplish that, oh say, by the time you’re thirty-six.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

I pointed toward the road ahead of us. “Did you know that, just this decade, a lady broke a world record of that very sort, but in an automobile?”

As though set ablaze, she cracked a chip-toothed smile and nodded wildly. Her head and all its fiercest matter become eternally buoyant. I imagined her floating just above the water’s surface.

**END**

**Monday, June 15, 2020**



## You

Thank you to the following generous souls for pre-ordering this novella. Your early investment afforded the author (who presently writes without agency, imprint, or academic affiliation) the financial flexibility necessary to meaningfully package this work, produce quality promotional assets, and adhere to her own editorial calendar. It takes a village to raise a decent writer — especially one so absent a safety net as myself.

I am pleased to be indebted to the following individuals for their commitment, their funds, and their exceptionally kind words of encouragement.

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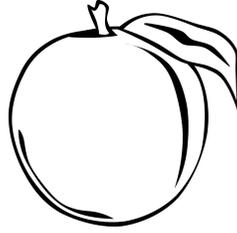
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Kaylin Turpin

*Co-Conspirators*

Randon Rosenbohm  
Maria Ylvisaker  
Marissa Zappas



## Marie & Ella's Peaches in Chartreuse Jelly

*Makes Six Servings*

Recipe courtesy *Mrs Beeton's Cookery Book* (England, 1861)

### Ingredients for the Chartreuse Jelly

- 5 tsp. powdered flavourless gelatin
- 2 cups water
- ⅓ cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup Chartreuse

### Directions for the Chartreuse Jelly

- Dissolve the gelatin in 1 cup of water.
- In a small pot, bring the remaining cup to a boil.
- Add the sugar and stir until it is entirely dissolved.
- Remove from heat and allow to cool for about 20 minutes.
- Add the Chartreuse and the gelatin and stir to combine.
- Pour into a 9" x 13" glass baking dish lined with waxed paper; refrigerate until completely set.

### Ingredients for the Peaches

- 3 large clingstone peaches
- 4 cups water
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 3 whole cloves

- Fresh lemon balm leaves or edible flowers

## Directions for the Peaches

- Cut the peaches in half and remove the stones.
- Immerse the peaches in a large pot of boiling water for about 30 seconds; then transfer them to ice water. Slip off the skins.
- In a large pot, combine the water and sugar; cook over medium heat stirring gently until sugar is dissolved. Bring to a boil and cook for one minute or until syrup is clear.
- Add lemon juice, cinnamon stick, and cloves.
- Add the prepared peaches making sure they are entirely immersed; cut a piece of parchment slightly smaller than the pot and place over the top of the peaches to make sure they remain submerged.
- Bring the syrup to a boil and reduce the heat to medium-low and poach the peaches gently for six minutes or until soft.
- Allow the peaches to cool in the syrup.
- This may be stored for 24 hours in the refrigerator.
- The syrup in which the peaches were poached is not required for the recipe, but you may reserve it for something else.
- To serve, turn out the jelly onto a cutting board and cut half into even little squares; the remaining half should be cut into decorative shapes using a cookie cutter.
- Plate the cut squares onto the centre of a flat plate, arranging the jelly shapes around the edges.
- Garnish with edible flowers or lemon balm leaves.

**Sarah Fonseca's** short fiction, essays, and criticism have been published in a wide range of publications, including *Bosie Magazine*, *Black Warrior Review*, Conde Nast's *them.*, *Lambda Review*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Museum of the Moving Image's *Reverse Shot*, and others.

She has held fellowships with Film at Lincoln Center, Lambda Literary, and People for the American Way.

Originally from Lincolnton, Georgia, Sarah Fonseca lives in New York City with a blood parrot cichlid, Punkin, and miniature dachshund, Djuna.

*Sea Queens* is her first novella.

In spring 1912, Major Archibald Butt dreads returning to a Washington that esteems political theatre over effective but unexciting solutions. With Thomas Francis McCaffrey serving as their fearless leader, globetrotters Thomson Beattie and John Hugo Ross struggle to keep up with the middle-aged Canadian they deeply revere. With a flock of French hens in tow, New York society ladies Ella White and Marie Grice Young fight to recall the qualities in one another with which they fell in love.

