



Troubled Souls

GENEVIEVE SCHOLL

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The following story contains strong and explicit sexual situations. The following story is intended for adult audiences only. Parental discretion is advised.

Cover design by Genevieve Scholl

Edited by Genevieve Scholl

Dedicated to the lost lives on the *Titanic* on April 15th 1912.
May your memory live on forever, and may your souls find
peace in the afterlife aboard a ship that will *actually* never
sink.

Books by Genevieve Scholl

The Naughty North Pole Novels

Love Claus

Hired for Christmas

Other Books

Novel Desire

Coming Soon

Father Christmas (The Last in The Naughty North Pole Novels) – July 2015

Parker's Proceedings, A Summer Short – August 2015

Broken by Blake – September 2015

Cop Anthology – February 2016

Praise for Troubled Souls

“I absolutely loved every aspect of this story. It is intriguing and captivating from the start.”

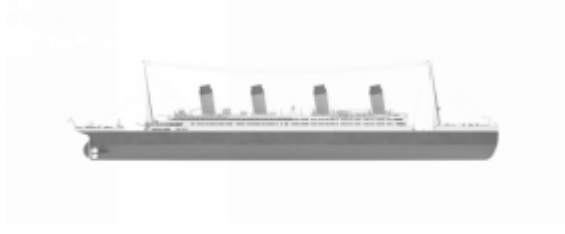
~ Caissy Boudreau, Author of *His to Protect*

“Troubled Souls was, once again, a fantastic read by the creative and wonderful Genevieve Scholl. The story drew me in from page one and held it through the whole book. I didn't put it down. I simply had to finish it in one sitting. To me, that is a great story! Thank you for sharing *Troubled Souls!*”

~ Diana Fisher, Author of *Set my Soul Free*

“Troubled Souls caught my attention from the very first page, and from there on, it was a crazy whirlwind of events! So different, intense, and unlike anything I have ever read before.”

~ Bria Starr, Author of *Downward Spiral*



Prologue

The clink of ice against glasses, the clang of silverware against dishes, the light music being played by the band on stage, and the low murmur of voices all mixed together to create a melodic tune of life aboard the ship. The men, women, and children of first class were dressed in their dining best, and sat at round tables that were cloaked in white, Irish Damask tablecloths. Cups for coffee and tea sat atop saucers. Dinner plates and soup bowls were stacked together in front of each passenger, waiting to be filled with delicious concoctions being served by the kitchen staff that flitted about the room—and the same was the case for the crystal glassware waiting to be filled with different types of liquid. For those who had yet to be served, the place setting was completed by the full set of flatware that rested on either side of the dishes—salad fork, dinner fork, and dessert fork from the left, and soup spoon, teaspoon, and dinner knife from the right.

Rosalee Redford looked down at her own place setting and frowned. Where was she? When was she? The atmosphere seemed familiar, as did the surroundings, but she couldn't quite figure it out. Her mind automatically went to the Titanic, but that wasn't possible. Was it? No, of course it wasn't. The RMS Titanic sunk one hundred and three years ago. It was 2015, not 1912. But it sure felt like the Titanic.

She ran her hands over the silk fabric of her gown, her fingers bumping over the bones of the corset she wore

beneath. Surprisingly, the body-shaping contraption wasn't as uncomfortable as she had expected. Rosalee inhaled deeply, and was surprised that the bones didn't poke into her ribs and ellicit a sharp pain. Perhaps it was a dream.

Just when she was about to test her theory with a pinch, someone waved their hand in front of her face to capture her attention. "Emily, have you been listening, darling?" She looked over at the man and took in his rugged good looks. He was older, but in a sophisticated, handsome way. The slight gray hair at his temples was attractive, but it was his deep green eyes that pulled her in. Rosalee didn't recognize him, but for some odd reason, she felt comforted by the bright smile that graced his face. "Emily?"

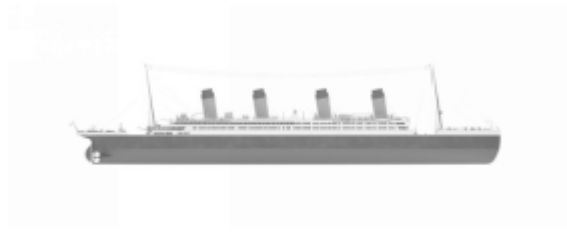
It took Rosalee a moment to realize that he was speaking to her. Why was he calling her Emily? Was the man senile? That wasn't even close to her name. Just when she was about to voice her question, the ship shook and the image wavered.

Rosalee woke with a start and suffered a moment of slight vertigo as the sight of the white walls in the hotel room came into view. As she blinked her eyes into focus, her brow scrounged in confusion. Had she just been dreaming about being a passenger on the *Titanic*? That was a first, but, considering she had just visited the artifact exhibit at *The Luxor Hotel & Casino* in Las Vegas, Nevada where she was vacationing with her best friend and her family, it wasn't much of a surprise. It made sense since the stories behind the artifacts and the tragic tale of the sinking of the great ship were still fresh in her mind.

The exhibit had been thick with emotion radiating from the items, practically drowning Rosalee in the feeling of despair and death. And it was a feeling that had clung to her throughout the night as she pondered about the ship and the passengers.

She'd always had a strange fascination with the ship, the time period, and even the tragedy that had claimed about

1,500 lives. Men, women, and children had struggled for their survival, only to plunge into the freezing depths of The Atlantic Ocean. But somehow, after that trip to Vegas and the dream, she felt even more connected to the historical event.



Chapter One

One Month Later...

The sound of running water pulled Rosalee from her slumber, and she slowly opened her eyes to greet the morning. The scent of coffee wafted through the house, enticing her taste buds enough for her to climb out of bed and pour herself a cup. But as she slid her legs out from beneath the sheets, the scent of man tempted her more than the caffeinated elixir that was waiting in the kitchen.

As she walked into the steamy bathroom, picking up the men's clothes strewn about the tiled floor, the thunderous sound of the waterfall shower rang in her ears. After hanging the clothes on the hook on the door and silently cursing the man who was currently showering, she leaned up against the sink and watched the water cascade down his muscular body. Desire coursed through her, remembering the night before when those muscles were pressed against her own body.

Rosalee had met Bradley two years prior at a local exhibit for the one-hundredth anniversary of the sinking of the *RMS Titanic*. Their relationship had been strong ever since, but he had still not popped the all-important question one asked a significant other of two years. He hadn't even hinted at it. And it wasn't that Rosalee absolutely needed the ring, because they had been practically living as a married couple already. But her love-sick best friend had begun to convince her that it was

‘the thing that was done’. Rosalee hated that way of thinking. There could have been several reasons why her boyfriend had yet to propose.

Bradley Commun was a busy guy, teaching history classes during the day, and working as a fact-checker for the local museum during the nights and weekends. And all of his extra money was going into lawyer fees, so he could try to gain full-custody of his twin, twelve-year-old boys from his alcoholic ex-wife. Maybe he just wasn’t ready to propose.

Rosalee shook her head to rid her mind of those thoughts. Bradley would propose eventually.

As if he sensed she was thinking about him, Bradley opened the glass shower door and raised his eyebrows at her. “Care to join me?” he asked in sign language with his wet, large hands.

Rosalee smiled. She remembered when she had first started dating Bradley. She thought his partial deafness would be difficult to get used to, but sign language had been easier to learn than she had expected. And since he was only about 35% deaf, due to a birth defect brought on by his mother’s excessive alcohol use during her pregnancy, he could communicate regularly as well. Sign language was just easier for him, because some words were hard to hear and speak more than others, especially since he was British and a lot of American words were pronounced differently than he was used to. He’d once described to Rosalee that it often sounded like he was trapped inside a wind tunnel and he heard an echoing. That was why he used ASL around the house more often, and Rosalee was okay with that.

She nodded, undressed, and walked into the shower. But as soon as her foot hit the tile, she felt herself falling. Bradley’s arms shot out to catch her, but not before her head introduced itself to the cold water knob. As blood fell over her eye, the shower and Bradley’s naked body disappeared, leaving nothing but darkness.

The cold April air raised goose bumps on her skin as she leaned over the ship's railing and stared down at the dark ocean. Silence surrounded her, save for the ocean water quietly lapping against the ship's hull. The rest of the passengers were asleep, resting for their next day of excitement. But Emily Lancaster couldn't sleep—no, she was not Emily Lancaster; she was Rosalee Redford. Yet, a part of her felt as if she were Emily Lancaster. Rosalee sighed; it was all so confusing. One second she was standing in the shower with Bradley, and the next she was a passenger on the RMS Titanic, wearing a heavy dressing gown with a corset and questioning who she really was.

“Emily?” Rosalee turned around to see the same older man who had been sitting beside her the first time she had been ‘on the Titanic’. His green eyes still pulled her in like a beacon. “What are you doing out here? You’re going to freeze to death,” he chastised as he walked over to her and wrapped a coat around her shoulders.

Em—Rosalee winced at his choice of words. “I couldn't sleep,” she told him.

“Are you alright?”

As he pulled her into his arms, all sense of Rosalee disappeared and Emily took over. She sighed and sunk into his embrace, wrapping her arms tightly around his midsection. Being in his arms provided a comfort which she needed at that moment. Emily had a bad feeling about the ship and the entire voyage to New York. Something was nagging at her; something bad was going to happen. She didn't know exactly what it was, or how she knew it was going to happen. But she knew there was disaster in their near future.

Emily Lancaster creased her brow as a bright light suddenly pierced her closed eyelids. Adding to the confusion, she also heard something making an irritating and repetitive noise, and could smell the strong scent of flowers. The sounds and scents of the ship were gone, and the slight motion of the

big girl had stopped. But how was that possible? Even if they were docked, the waves would create at least a small movement of the ship.

Slowly opening her eyes, Emily took in her surroundings. A gasp escaped her lips as she saw the white walls and the industrial scenery outside the window. No, this wasn't right. Where was the ship? How did she get there?

Where is here? she thought as she looked around.

Finding the source of the irritating noise—some weird, large, intimidating machine—she followed some kind of line from it to the tip of her hand. And that's when she noticed the smooth, cream-colored skin that wasn't hers, and the outrageous color of the fingernails. That wasn't her hand ... yet, as she concentrated on moving the hand, the fingers wiggled with ease.

Choosing to ignore that for the time being, Emily continued to survey the room. A box was suspended from the ceiling, projecting colorful moving pictures. It was an advertisement for something called the internet. It was like a newspaper come to life, with the addition of color. It was vibrant and beautiful ... and strange.

The sudden sound of *Vivaldi* filled the room, making Emily jump. She looked in the direction of the sound and saw a man rise from his position in a nearby chair. Pulling a little metal box out of his pocket, he flipped it open and pressed it to his ear.

“Hello?” he said into the contraption. Was he talking to a machine? “No, I'm sorry, sir. My girlfriend is in the hospital, and I'm not leaving until she does.” He waited a moment, and then nodded. “Sure, I can do that. Email me,” he finished before shutting the box again.

As he slipped it back into his pocket, he walked over to stand next to the bed. The stranger reached for her hand, and for some reason, Emily let him. She felt as if he were familiar in a way. Emily sharply inhaled as he looked down at her and

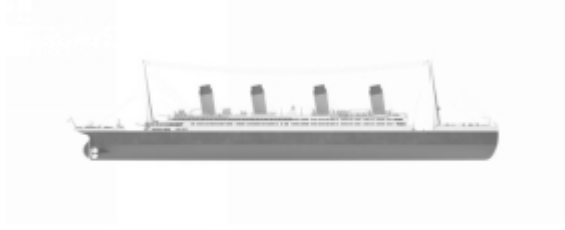
smiled. He looked just like her husband, Stanley. Okay, they weren't identical—this man was much younger, and had a lighter complexion than Stanley—but the similarities were impossible to ignore. His green eyes were intelligent and bright, and his smile was comforting and gorgeous. Did Stanley have a son she didn't know about?

The thought of Stanley and the realization that he wasn't there stabbed her heart and sent tears down her cheeks. The mystery man's face softened and he swiped the pads of his thumbs beneath her eyes, capturing the salty droplets on his skin.

“Shhh...don't cry, Rosa,” he soothed. “You're going to be fine. The doctor said everything was fine and I could take you home tomorrow. They just want to keep you here for observation.”

He pushed the hair from her eyes, and Emily tried to speak, but her throat was dry and scratchy. After the stranger helped her take a sip of water, she tried again, and voiced the only question she could think of.

“Who's Rosa?”



Chapter Two

Bradley snapped his head back at Rosalee's question. The doctor hadn't said there was any possibility of amnesia, but he guessed that was why they kept people for observation. Bradley could only hope it was temporary. After pressing the nurse's button, he gently sat on the edge of the bed and carefully grabbed Rosalee's hand in his, making lazy circles on the top with his thumb. He didn't want to say anything for fear of jarring her memory and causing some kind of damage.

A nurse walked in to the room and smiled when she saw that Rosalee was awake. "How are you feeling, Rosalee?" she asked sweetly.

Bradley winced at the mention of her name, and looked down at Rosalee's creased brow.

"Who's Rosalee?" she questioned. "My name is Emily," she added.

The nurse—whose name was Daphne, according to her badge—looked between Rosalee and Bradley in confusion. "She seems to be suffering a little amnesia," he told her. "Is it a cause for concern?"

Daphne's smile reappeared, though it wasn't as cheerful as the last time. "It's possible with any head injury, of course; though we weren't expecting it with such a minor bump. But that's why we keep people in for 24-hour observation." She moved a chair close to the bed and took a

seat. "After I gather a bit of information and check her vitals, I'll have the doctor stop by to talk to you." Bradley nodded, and Daphne turned to Rosalee. "Are you up for a few questions?" She nodded, and Daphne pat her hand before continuing. "Now, Emily," she paused as she smiled at Rosalee. The use of the name made Rosalee visibly relax, and Bradley sighed...she really did believe her name was Emily, "do you know your last name?"

"Lancaster," she answered immediately.

Daphne nodded and wrote on the paper she held. "Do you know why you're in the hospital?"

Rosalee shook her head. "The last thing I remember is standing on the ship."

"What ship?" Bradley asked gently.

"The *Titanic*, of course. Magnificent beauty, she is." Bradley and Daphne looked at each other, but said nothing as Rosalee continued. "I was just saying to Stanley the other night while we were eating in the dining room about how elegant the architecture was; even the washrooms have a charm to them. Thomas Andrews was a genius when he designed that vessel."

Bradley's brow creased in confusion. Amnesia was one thing, but to believe she had been a passenger on the ill-fated *Titanic* was hard to believe. Was it some sort of coping mechanism?

Having known Rosalee for years, he had seen her passion of the history of the *Titanic*. In fact, that passion was one of the reasons he had fallen so hard for her. And after spending countless hours researching the ship, the passengers, and the sinking, Bradley knew she knew enough to make the concept of being aboard the *Titanic* believable to most.

Daphne nodded and stood. "I'll go get the doctor," she said simply as she walked out of the room.

Bradley didn't blame her. There really was no appropriate response after someone told you they were a

passenger on the *Titanic*...in 2015. And as they waited for the doctor, he had no idea what to say either. An awkward silence hung in the air as Rosalee—Emily—cupped one of the roses on her side table with her hand and leaned forward to inhale the aroma. Finally, Bradley decided the only recourse was to acquaint himself with Emily Lancaster.

“So...your name is Emily?” he questioned. Even though he already knew the answer, he wanted to gain her trust.

She nodded. “What is your name?” she asked.

Bradley tried to suppress a wince; to know she didn’t remember him, hurt more than he wanted. “Bradley,” he told her slowly, wondering if the mention of his name would spark a memory. When it didn’t, he sighed and sat down in the chair Daphne had vacated. “It’s nice to meet you, Emily.”

She smiled. “You as well.” She paused for a moment before continuing. “Bradley, may I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

“What’s your last name?”

“Why?”

“You remind me of someone,” she admitted.

“Commun—Bradley Commun,” he told her, though he didn’t mean to sound like *James Bond*.

“Oh,” she whispered.

“Who do I remind you of?” Bradley asked gently as he ignored the vibrating cell phone in his pocket; he knew it was just his boss again.

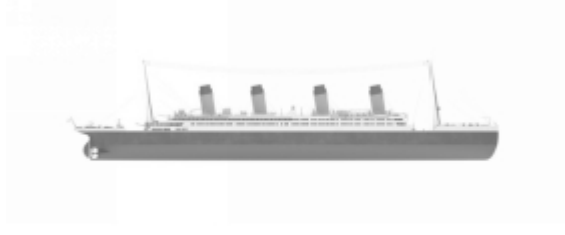
“My husband.” His heart stopped at that, but then he remembered it was Emily that was talking; not his girlfriend, Rosalee. “The man I mentioned earlier ... Stanley. He has bright green eyes like you.”

Before Bradley could respond, the doctor walked in and began examining her. As he did, Bradley moved to the

window and pondered over everything Emily had told them. While it wasn't outside the realm of Rosalee's mind for her to make up such an elaborate story, it seemed too perfected to not have some truth to it. But was she getting a dream mixed up with reality? Or perhaps she had woken in her hospital bed and seen the movie on the television, and was using that as the basis for her story. But that didn't make sense, because the movie didn't mention Emily or Stanley Lancaster. As much as he didn't *want* to believe it, because he was a historian and prone to believing in facts instead of possibility, part of him had to admit that he *had* begun to believe her story. When he'd looked into her eyes while she told her tale, there had been no hint of the Rosalee he knew...no recollection of him or their life together, or modern day. The only time he had seen any sign of life within the irises was when she spoke of Stanley and their voyage aboard the ship.

Could it be true? Could the spirit of Emily Lancaster have found its way inside the woman he loved? And would Rosalee ever return to him, so he could ask her the one question he had been waiting to ask until the time was right?

Bradley fingered the spherical object in his pocket as a tear slid down his cheek. *Come back to me, Rosa.*



Chapter Three

Rosalee watched in horror as the fifty-foot iceberg grew closer to the side of the ship. She knew what was coming, but she couldn't move or scream. Fear had frozen her to the spot and stolen her voice. All that escaped her mouth was the vapor condensation of her warm breath hitting the frigid air.

But her mind was going a mile a minute. What was she still doing aboard the ship? Where had the mysterious man gone? Why couldn't she wake up from the nightmare? She had never gotten so close to the disastrous moment before in her dreams, or visions, or whatever they were. She'd always woken up while the passengers were happy and celebratory; no one had ever been afraid. Even the first time she had dreamt of being Emily and the ship had shaken, hinting toward the iceberg meeting the side of the ship, Rosalee had still awoken before anyone had even an air of concern over the commotion. Why was she suddenly unable to pull herself out of the vision and back to Bradley? Was this more than just a dream? Was Rosalee trapped in 1912, and doomed to go down with the ship?

Bradley moved in his groggy state to resituate himself atop the edge of Rosalee's mattress where he laid his head against his crossed forearms. It wasn't the most comfortable position he had ever slept in, but it wasn't the worse either, and he would do whatever it took to be beside Rosalee every

minute she was in the hospital, even if she thought her name was Emily and she was married to someone named Stanley. The love of his life was in there somewhere, and he knew she would come back to him eventually.

Just as he thought he would drift back to sleep again, Rosalee's arm moved slightly and touched his own. Bradley jumped back in shock as it felt like the contact had burned him. After his eyes adjusted to the light in the room, he leaned forward and touched her arm with his fingertips, only to jerk them back when pain radiated up his arm. Rosalee's skin was bitter cold, and Bradley screamed for help as he repeatedly pressed the nurse-call button beside the bed.

As several came rushing into the room, they asked him what was wrong and he explained, which led to them scurrying about the room like cockroaches afraid of the light as they did whatever was necessary to heighten her body temperature. Nothing seemed to work, and Rosalee's skin had begun to turn blue as panic rose in Bradley's throat, causing him to quickly bend toward the wastebasket beside the bed and empty his stomach contents inside the small plastic bag. Rosalee couldn't die...not yet; it wasn't her time. It wasn't time for their relationship to come to an end.

Bradley wanted to scream at the nurses and the doctors who had joined the commotion, and demand they do something, but his voice caught in his throat as more bile burned its way up his esophagus. Besides, he knew that the medical professionals knew what they were doing and would do whatever it took.

Just as he was about to pray for someone above to save her, everyone went still and watched the monitors. Bradley lifted his head from the vomit filled wastebasket and glanced at the machine, seeing Rosalee's temperature rising ever so slowly. He breathed a sigh of relief and slumped onto the tiled floor, leaning his head against the wall and attempting to calm his erratic heartbeat. Rosalee was safe ... for now.

“What happened?” one of the female doctors asked him as she lent him a hand so he could lift himself off the floor. After she led him to a nearby chair and checked him over, Bradley shook his head. There was nothing he could say; he had no idea what had happened. The doctor smiled gently and pat his hand as she took his pulse. “Don’t worry; everything’s going to be fine now.”

After she dropped his wrist, he ran his hands across his face, and then took the offered cup of water from one of the nurses and sipped it slowly. “What could have caused this?” he asked the doctor.

She sighed and slipped her hands inside her pockets. “It looks like hypothermia, but it makes no sense. There’s nothing that could have caused hypothermia here. No environmental factors could have caused it, and although she has a head injury, there’s no damage to the hypothalamus. It’s...strange.”

“Doctor,” a nurse said, grabbing their attentions, “she’s waking up.”

Something smelled good—a mix of sweet and spicy; like chocolate with jalapeno flakes mixed in to the batter. She recognized that scent. Bradley. Rosalee opened her eyes slowly, afraid of what she would see. Had the ship sunk and she was dead, only smelling Bradley’s cologne one last time before she passed through the golden gates? Was Rosalee dead? No, she decided as she opened her eyes the rest of the way, she wasn’t dead; she was home. Well, near enough. It wasn’t the house she and Bradley called home, but at least it was the right time period.

“Are you alright?”

Bradley’s deep voice dragged her attention to the left and she focused on his form beside her. His hair was disheveled and a day’s worth of stubble was on his jaw, but otherwise he looked normal.

“Bradley,” she whispered.

He smiled wide. “Rosa? Is it really you?” Rosalee nodded, scrunching her brow in confusion. Of course it was she. Why would he think she was someone else? “Thank goodness,” he breathed as a tear trailed down his bronzed cheek.

“Where am I?” she asked as he passed her a cup of water.

Bradley kissed the back of her hand. “You’re in the hospital, love. Do you remember this morning?”

Rosalee took a few breaths as images flashed across the monitor of her mind like a movie sequence. She remembered being on the *Titanic* and seeing the impending iceberg. She remembered something about waking up to the smell of coffee, and something about worrying about Bradley proposing... But there were too many large plot holes in that particular chapter of her book of life. Rosalee tried her hardest to remember what had landed her in the hospital, but a throbbing headache began to pound behind her skull and she winced from the pain.

“Are you in pain?” a feminine voice asked.

Rosalee whipped her head around, coming face to face with a young, blonde physician. Her white coat hung loosely over her strangely elegant clothes, and gapped open as she took the stethoscope from around her neck. It was weird to see a doctor dressed in dress pants and a feminine, French silk blouse. Sometimes, Rosalee forgot that doctors were normal people and not just men and women who lived to care for the ill. They had lives outside of the sterile walls of the hospital, and, evidently, some of them even had fashion sense. Of course, if Rosalee spent day in and day out in a boring white coat, she’d probably do whatever it took to feel normal beneath it as well.

“No, I’m alright,” she told the doctor.

“Are you sure?”

Rosalee nodded. "I'll be okay. I don't want any kind of drugs, if that's alright."

"Of course. But if the pain becomes any worse, I'll have to do what's right for my patient."

She nodded again. "Understood."

Bradley stood and shook the doctor's hand. "Thank you...for everything." She smiled and nodded to them both before leaving the room. Bradley walked back over to the bed and knelt on the tiled floor. "I was so scared," he told Rosalee.

As he kissed her hand again, Rosalee stroked his sandy blond hair. "Tell me what happened," she requested gently.

Bradley explained everything, and it slowly came back to Rosalee. She remembered hitting her head on the faucet. Gingerly, she lifted her fingertips to her forehead and prodded the wound. She winced as it stung beneath the bandage, and then realized Bradley had kept talking, but Rosalee had stopped listening. After she'd asked him to repeat himself, she couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"What?"

"You had temporary amnesia, Rosa. You thought your name was Emily...Emily Lancaster. And you were talking about the *Titanic* like you had just been on board; like it was 1912 and the sinking had never happened."

One thing about being a private investigator was that your brain went into overdrive when there was a puzzle to solve, and Rosalee's was racing to find the solution. Perhaps it hadn't really been a dream when she was on the ship, watching the iceberg grow closer. If she had been on the ship, but in Emily's body...perhaps Emily Lancaster had found her way into Rosalee's body as well. But was that even possible? Could two souls travel through time and space to switch bodies? And without the use of a phone-booth time machine and the assistance of a time lord.

Normally, she would have laughed at the concept. While she believed in ghosts, spirits, and the energy of a life in

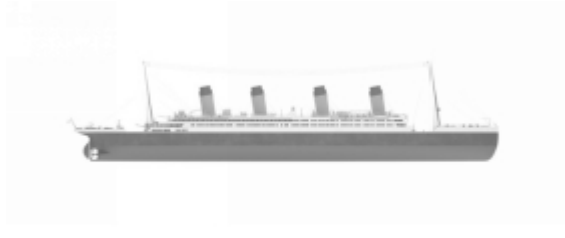
objects, the idea of two beings switching bodies never held much merit in her mind. But time travel...that was always something that intrigued her. Something she had always *wanted* to be true. And while she still didn't get to go back to 1865 to meet *Abraham Lincoln*, the best United States president in her opinion, the recent events tugged at the adventurous gene inside her.

She looked back down into Bradley's eyes, knowing he was intrigued by a good mystery as well. "Did anything else happen?"

He took a breath and visibly swallowed. "Yes," Bradley said slowly.

"Tell me."

A deep sigh emanated from his chest and pushed through his lips. "You nearly died, Rosa."



Chapter Four

Twelve hours later, Rosalee was settled into her own bed, forced to spend two days—48 long hours—“resting” underneath the sheets and only getting up for restroom breaks and eating meals. As Bradley tucked her in, she grumbled her displeasure. She didn’t want to spend the day watching some mindless television show that she couldn’t care less about. She had open cases waiting for her on her desk, and clients waiting for the answers.

Bradley sat beside her on the edge of the bed. “Can you please stop worrying in that pretty head of yours? Carrie can take care of the business for the next two days, and I’ll call your clients and let them know what’s going on. You just had a head injury, and although it wasn’t a very big one, you need time to rest and heal.” He pushed a strand of hair behind her ear. “Please try to enjoy the time off,” he pleaded.

Rosalee sighed. “I’d enjoy it a lot more if you didn’t have to go to work.”

His face fell. “I’m sorry, love. I tried to get the time off, but it was refused because it’s mid-term season.”

Rosalee sighed again, momentarily closing her eyes. “I know.”

“Do you need anything before I leave? I’m going to stop at the shop on the way home and buy some supplies... milk and such...do you want me to stop by the rental and pick us out some movies?”

She nodded, and Bradley stood to leave. “And get some ice cream, too!” she yelled after him. If he was offering to pamper her, Rosalee was going to take advantage of it. He chuckled from downstairs. “Thank you!” Rosalee added, deciding bed rest wasn’t reason enough to stop being nice.

As soon as the door clicked closed, Rosalee flung back the sheets and touched her feet to the floor. After a slight bout of dizziness, she took a sip of water from the bottle Bradley had placed on the nightstand, and then crossed the room for her laptop. If she wasn’t allowed to go into the office, at least she could do the legwork from home and try not to go insane. She had an elderly man looking for proof of his wife’s infidelity, a young mother wondering if her son was doing some kind of drugs, or dealing, a regal woman who hired Rosalee to find out who was embezzling from her company, and many more clients. She couldn’t just stop doing her job when those people were depending on her and her company.

Once the computer was booted-up, she opened the internet, and grabbed a legal-pad and a pen from the drawer of the night stand. After writing the name of her first client on the top of the page, she made an outline of what sort of information she needed to collect. Since Rosalee couldn’t do too much research on the infidelity with only the internet at her disposal, aside from checking the woman’s *Facebook* page, she started with the embezzling and typed the name of the woman’s company into the search engine. Once she printed the list of employees, she began the grueling task of looking up everyone’s past criminal records.

After two hours of reading about juvenile indiscretions and a few arrests for theft—that would be her first step when she made it back to work; checking out those thefts—Rosalee grew tired, and was starting to develop a headache. She closed down the laptop and placed it gingerly on the floor beside the bed. She would do more research when she woke from a short nap. She wasn’t normally a napping woman, but the headache that was progressively getting worse gave her no choice. It

was the only solution when she got headaches; especially her frequent migraines, and she had a feeling that this one was going to turn into one of those horrible migraines when even the slightest crack of light felt like a thousand suns burning into her retinas.

Rosalee shut her eyes before it reached that level, and tried to relax beneath the sheets. But as she slowly drifted off to sleep, she began to feel frigid. Her brain said it was something to worry about, but her body had already given up the fight, and Rosalee floated off to dreamland.

Rosa...

Rosalee opened her eyes when she heard the distant, eerie voice calling her name. Her headache was gone, but she was no longer in her own bedroom. As she looked around her, she ran her hand along the patterned wallpaper and she knew exactly where she was. After years of extensive research, Rosalee could have described that wallpaper with her eyes closed.

Rosa...

The voice echoed again, and Rosalee quickly climbed out of the bed and stood on the hardwood floor. She swayed a moment, but once she found her sea-legs, she slid the silk robe off the nearby hook and onto her body. The slight swaying of the ship made it difficult to walk, but once Rosalee's equilibrium was in balance, she made her way to the suite's door and headed to the deck.

Rosa...

Following the voice, she found herself in the reading room. The large space was decorated with white paneling on the walls and a beautiful design on the ceiling, and large, red sitting chairs covered in velvet fabric sat about the room. At the late hour, no one should have been occupying the room. In fact, the room should have been closed off, and no one allowed

entrance. Yet, Rosalee was able to walk right inside...and she wasn't the only one.

A woman, dressed in 20th century clothing, stood by the wall, thumbing through the pages of a book. But as Rosalee grew closer to her, she could see that the pages were blank... as was the look on the woman's face. Rosalee squinted her eyes as she took in the woman's features. Without even asking, she knew who the woman was; the similarities between she and Rosalee were just too coincidental. This was Emily Lancaster.

Suddenly, Emily shut the book and her eyes cleared as she focused on Rosalee's face. "Rosa," she whispered. "Save me. Save us."

Rosalee frowned. "I can't; the sinking is cemented in history. I can't change it without changing everything."

"Save us, Rosa."

"How? Tell me how," she pleaded.

"Save us."

"How?!" Rosalee repeated, raising her voice a little in desperation.

But before she got an answer, Emily and the ship began to fade, leaving Rosalee standing suspended over the freezing waters of The Atlantic Ocean. And just as the floor disappeared beneath her feet, her heart dropped into her stomach as she plunged beneath the surface.

Rosalee jerked awake, dripping in sweat yet freezing beneath the bed sheets. Her heart was racing faster than ever before. Why did Emily want her to save her? How could she possibly save the passengers of the *Titanic* when it was a moment cemented in history? She wasn't exactly a time traveler. Although, there had to be some sort of explanation for the visions and the body jumps she had been experiencing. They were just too realistic to have been merely dreams. So

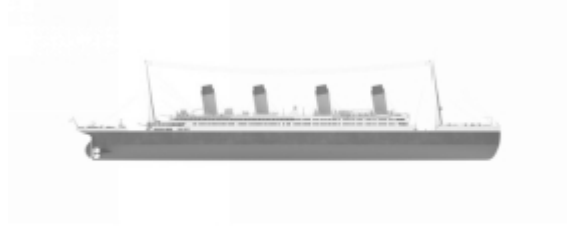
what were they exactly? Humans couldn't time travel. It just wasn't possible. And even if they could, everything she'd ever been taught in movies, television shows, books...everything told her that to travel in time and try to stop something from happening could cause a ripple or some kind of rip in time that would change *everything*, and not just that one occurrence. So even if she were to somehow save the passengers, Rosalee could very well risk the lives of hundreds of others... thousands, possibly. Which meant that no matter what, people would die. How did someone, anyone, make that kind of decision?

Rosalee sat back against the headboard, closed her eyes, and took a few deep breaths. She wasn't going to get anywhere by letting her emotions run the party. Her P.I brain needed to be in charge. What was the next logical step? Rosalee smiled. As with any other case she worked, the only logical step there was to take was that of knowledge. Information. Research.

Bending at the waist over the side of the mattress, she picked up the laptop she had sat on the floor before falling asleep and hastily opened up her internet browser. She needed to know all there was to know about Emily Lancaster and the *Titanic*. Well, she already knew everything she could know about the ship. At least, everything that was public knowledge. But she needed every in depth bit of information she could find on Emily and her *connection* to the ship. Why was she on board? Where were she and Stanley coming from? Where were they going?

Each website seemed like a blur as she read through the information available online. Emily had been traveling from Cherbourg, France to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was born in August of 1882, and died in June of 1942, which made her about sixty years old when she passed. Knowing that she had survived the sinking was encouraging, but also brought more confusion along with it. If she survived then why would she ask Rosalee to save her? It made no sense. And aside from her cabin number, there was no further information

that was of use in figuring out Rosalee's next move. But one thing was for sure, one thing would never change, she had to do *something*.



Chapter Five

Research isn't just the gathering of information, but rather the attainment of power. And the greatest power in the world...the greatest weapon against the forces of fate...is knowledge. Having all the knowledge in the world may not make a person clairvoyant or some sort of God, but without knowledge there is no definition of human. To be a mammal is not the same as humanity. A lot of people may say that the heart makes an earthling a human being, but in reality, the mind is more powerful. Without the brain, one could not experience pain, joy, fear. Without knowledge, the human race is nothing but an empty vessel. Personalities, emotions... love...are just added bonuses.

Knowledge was what Bradley had based his life upon—but the knowledge he had just discovered ... the truth of who he was ... brought out his more mortal tendencies. An emotional martini—shaken, not stirred—was mixing together in his brain; confusion being the garnish.

He read the ancestry chart again, but shook his head when it yielded the same information as before. It was right there in plain sight. Stanley Lancaster was his great-grandfather.

But how was that possible? They had two different last names. And how had Bradley not known? He prided himself in knowing everything possible, especially about himself.

Knowledge was power, and for once, he felt powerless. It was time to get some answers.

Determined to find out more about Emily, Rosalee left her bed and took a hot shower. Bradley would be furious when he learned she had gone against his wishes and left, but he would cool down eventually. Hoping it would appease the man she loved, Rosalee called for a cab as she towel dried her hair. She wasn't a huge fan of taxi cabs, but even her stubborn self knew it was probably not smart to operate a car with a head injury. A lot of people thought she was crazy for having a slight fear of cab drivers, but anyone who ever watched crime shows likely felt the same. When taking a taxi, one's life was in the driver's hands, and it wouldn't be difficult to drive somewhere remote, knock a person out, and toss their body in the trunk.

On that note, Rosalee grabbed her survival kit—knives, lock picks, pepper spray, etc—and slid it into her purse as a horn honked outside, signaling the arrival of her cab. She closed the door behind her as she headed outside, but retreated inside on second thought and dashed into the home office to grab her PI badge. While she may not have been on official duty, she never knew when it might come in handy.

After hopping in the cab and giving the driver her destination, she unlocked her cell phone and checked her emails. Luckily, there were no messages from clients wondering why she hadn't contacted them with more information yet. But she was happy to see that some of her sources had responded with the details she had been seeking on a few things, and she smiled when she opened one message and found out that her client's wife had been legally married to another woman and their current marriage wasn't binding. That was one case solved! Although she did feel bad for her client, and wasn't looking forward to telling him.

After thanking her source for the information, Rosalee decided the rest of the emails could wait and shut down her

phone as the cab neared the library. While it wasn't required to turn off your phone when entering the library, Rosalee always thought it was respectful to do so, so as not to disrupt the serene feeling the place gave everyone. Plus, she was the kind of person who believed that books were real scenes being played out on paper, and the characters were alive inside. They didn't need to be interrupted with her telephone conversations about her cases or love life.

Rosalee paid the driver and stepped onto the curb after a slight bit of nausea. She took a deep breath, hoping the feeling would pass soon. She knew it was because of her head injury, but finding out how to help Emily was more important at that moment. Once the taxi sped away, nearly soaking her in the rainwater that puddled on the side of the road, she headed inside. The Thomas London Library was the biggest in the state, and housed almost every book imaginable. Previously, there used to be separate buildings for each type of book—legal, recreational, etc. But when the individual libraries had begun to struggle financially, it was voted upon that they would all merge into one. Then the problem became that they didn't have anywhere large enough to hold everything. However, luck seemed to be on their side when a wealthy, older townsman had to move into a nursing home after the death of his wife, and he generously donated his home/mansion to the town. And ever since the move was made, in addition to being the largest in the state, it was also the busiest. People loved the classy atmosphere and the huge selection of books. A room was available for young children to play while their parents scanned the shelves, and the large kitchen/dining room had been converted into a quaint café. Writers were able to reserve a room to have meetings, or rent a third floor bedroom for a weekend to meet their deadline, complete with full room-service and unlimited access to the reference section of the library. The second dining room had been locked, and was only used when a group of law students had to pull an all-nighter, or corporate officers needed a meeting area.

Light music was filtered through the stacks of books and the lobby. The sitting room, complete with fireplace, was used for quiet reading, or allowed people to sit and sip a coffee or tea as they gazed out the large picture window, into the back garden in full bloom.

Next to the garden was an indoor walkway, which had been added to the original building, that led to a separate building where computer rooms and copy machines waited to be used.

It was truly magnificent, and seemed to be never-ending. Rosalee often found herself lost among the halls, and had utilized the call boxes spread through the building to ask for directions.

But knowing exactly where she was going would help avoid that trouble. She smiled and waved at the receptionists at the lobby desk, and then headed to the black door that led to the basement. She chuckled that death records were in the basement. *How appropriate*, she mused as she descended down the stairs. She'd never actually been down to the death records, since none of her past cases as a PI needed it, but she knew where they were held because she'd read about someone who had attempted to steal some records in the newspaper.

While Rosalee had unearthed the fact that Emily Lancaster had been buried in New York, the internet hadn't given any specifics, hence the trip to the death records. Granted, it probably held no merit as to who Emily was and how Rosalee was supposed to save them, but Rosalee felt she had an obligation to visit the woman's gravesite.

Once she'd reached the basement floor, she stopped at the desk and greeted the worker sitting behind it. "Hello, my name is Rosalee Redford, and I'm looking for information on a woman named Emily Lancaster," she told the young man, who continued to type on the computer without even a glance in her direction.

He took a breath. "Death records can only be accessed by family, law enforcement, and medical examiners," he

responded mechanically, again without looking at her.

Rosalee smiled as she dug in her purse. That was the exact reason she had grabbed her badge. Holding it up for the boy to see, she waited for him to make eye contact, and then slid it back inside her bag. He sighed in what Rosalee was sure was irritation and turned away from his computer, handing her the sign-in sheet and then handing her a visitor pass.

“Time with the files is limited to thirty minutes at a time, and I must ask you to leave your bag in the cabinet,” he said as he pointed to his left at a glass cabinet. “I’m also obligated to inform you that you are being monitored by security cameras.”

Rosalee nodded. “Why so much security over death records?” she asked before she could stop herself.

He paused. “That information is classified,” he told her cryptically.

Rosalee sighed, nodded, and put her purse in the cabinet. She hated to not have her bag on her person, but she would play by the rules to get the information she wanted. Plus, if there really were cameras recording every inch of the basement, no one would risk stealing anything.

Before she had even turned around from the cabinet, the boy had continued typing and ignoring Rosalee. He hadn’t even provided his name. Rude! After making a face at him, she made her way to the section labeled A-L and began her search. Finding Emily’s death certificate hadn’t taken long, but had yielded the information she was hoping for, the location of her grave. And she could be there in less than twenty minutes; maybe closer to a half hour once she stopped for flowers.



Chapter Six

Clutching the pink roses, Rosalee gingerly stepped around the tombstones in search of Emily's final resting place. She didn't even want to clear her throat as she passed grave after grave, for fear of disturbing the spirits that may have lingered. Cemeteries both frightened her and fascinated her all at the same time. While she didn't believe in zombies or vampires rising from the coffins, she did believe in aggressive spirits who took their anger out on others. But on the other hand, she loved the gentle feel of the atmosphere, the quiet surroundings. There was a sense of peace, yet grief shrouded the headstones.

About fifteen minutes later, Rosalee finally found the headstone labeled Emily Lancaster in the large cemetery. Kneeling beside the stone—never directly in front out of respect for the dead buried beneath—she placed the bouquet against it as she whispered, “Hello, Emily.” The wind blew gently against her face as if in whispered greeting, and Rosalee allowed a tear to fall. She had to help Emily's poor, restless soul find peace. No matter the cost.

The wind blew harder, as if in anger, whipping Rosalee's hair against her skin. She winced at the sting of the vicious strands, and then looked up at the sky to see if the weather had changed. But the sun still burned against the cloudless sky, forming the sweat that she could feel trickling down her back. That wind hadn't been created by Mother Nature.

Rosalee creased her brow. “Why are you mad?” she asked Emily’s invisible spirit. But no answer came, and Rosalee sighed and momentarily closed her eyes. “I will figure this out, Emily,” she vowed as she placed her hand against the stone. “I promise.”

As she opened her eyes again, she jumped back in surprise as bold, red letters appeared on the stone, the ground, and even her skin.

STAY AWAKE, STAY ALIVE

STAY AWAKE, STAY ALIVE

STAY AWAKE, STAY ALIVE

STAY AWAKE, STAY ALIVE

STAY AWAKE, STAY ALIVE

STAY AWAKE, STAY ALIVE

Back at the house, a flurry of activity filled the rooms. Police officers were on cell-phones, neighbors were in the kitchen making coffee and food for everyone, and Bradley was pacing a hole in the carpet of the living room. But as soon as he saw Rosalee enter, he ran to her and wrapped his arms around her, squeezing so tight she could scarcely breathe. Still, she didn’t ask him to let go, or push him away. After what had just happened at the cemetery, she was more than happy to let him hold her for as long as he wanted.

STAY AWAKE, STAY ALIVE

Rosalee had no idea what those words meant, but the safety of Bradley’s arms relieved the fear they instilled in her, at least for a moment.

Bradley pulled back only enough to look into her eyes. “Where have you been? I’ve been terrified something had happened to you,” he said in a panic.

“I’m sorry. I thought I would be back before you came home.” She looked at the clock; Bradley should have still been

at work. “What are you doing here?”

“Call me crazy, but when I try to call my girlfriend who was supposed to be in bed recovering from a head injury and she doesn’t answer, I think the worst and come running.”

Rosalee’s eyes began to tear. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

Bradley sighed and pulled her against him again. “You’re here and you’re safe, that’s all that matters now.” He led her to the couch. “Here, sit and relax while I get rid of everyone.”

She nodded and did as she was asked. As Bradley left to see everyone out, Rosalee reached for the television remote with shaking hands. Between the fear those red words had caused and the tears that wanted to spill over the worry she had caused the man she loved, she could barely press the power button. Bradley came back inside after escorting everyone out and sat down beside her. He noticed her trembling hands and took them into his own.

“Are you alright? Can I get you anything?”

After a deep breath, Rosalee decided she needed to calm her nerves. “Could I have a cup of coffee?” she asked.

He nodded, left the room, and came back a few moments later with a mug filled with coffee exactly the way she liked it. Rosalee took a tentative sip, and then a few more once she realized it was cool enough to drink. Once her hands stopped shaking and she felt somewhat normal again, she put the mug on the coffee table and turned toward Bradley. She knew he would want an explanation, and Rosalee was ready to give one, but she wasn’t sure how much of it he would agree with or believe.

“What happened, Rosalee?” he predictably questioned.

Rosalee took a deep breath, asked him to wait until she was finished before commenting, and relayed the whole story. He was silent at first, but then he placed his hands on her shoulders and looked her straight in the eyes.

“You can’t change history, Rosa.”

“But I have to do *something*! I can’t just let them die if I have an opportunity to save them.”

“You can’t.”

“Watch me.”

She grabbed her keys to leave.

“What about us!?” His loud voice shocked her, and she turned around to face him again. He had never raised his voice to her before. “Rosa, listen to me.” He sighed as he reverted back to sign language. “I did some of my own research, and I found out that I’m a descendant of Stanley—yes, *that* Stanley.” Rosalee’s pulse increased rapidly. If Bradley was a descendant of Emily’s husband then his future... “Rosa, if you change history...if you stop the ship from sinking...you could change *me*. And if you change *me*, you change *us*.”

Rosalee jerked her head up and looked into Bradley’s eyes. “Us,” she whispered. “Us...she said us.”

“What?”

“Emily said us; save *us*.”

Bradley abruptly stood. “Rosa, I told you; you can’t...”

“No, no, no,” she interrupted. “She said us...not *them*, *us*.”

“So, what does that mean?”

Rosalee worked it out in her head, and then smiled without humor. “Emily doesn’t want me to stop the sinking. If she did, she would have said save *them*. But she said *us*.”

“But what does that mean?” Bradley questioned again.

“*Us*, not *them*. *Us*, not *them*. *Us* means more than one...but more than one can just be two,” she rambled as her brain processed the new information. “Two; me and Emily. We’re connected, and while we’re still connected, we can still switch.”

Bradley stopped and stared. “And if you can still switch, you could die if you’re in her body when the ship sinks.”

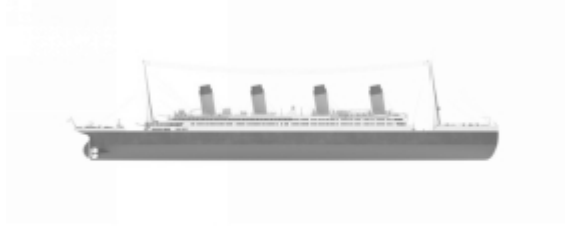
“Exactly,” Rosalee exclaimed. “Stay awake, stay alive. That’s what that meant. If I sleep, I dream, and if I dream, we switch.” Rosalee slipped her shoes on and grabbed her keys again, as Bradley followed. “But a person can’t stay awake forever. Eventually I’m going to fall asleep, no matter how hard I try not to.” Bradley stayed silent, obviously unsure what to say. “Don’t you see? I have to break the connection.”

“But you don’t even know how the connection was made,” he pointed out.

Rosalee shook her head. “No, but I know where it started, and that’s a good place to begin.”

“Okay...”

Rosalee smiled again, always ready for an adventure. “Bradley, we’re going to Vegas.”



Chapter Seven

Las Vegas, Nevada

The Luxor

Titanic Exhibit

Each artifact gave off a vibe, like something was residing inside all of them. Some spirit or memory of what once was. Was it possible that Emily's soul hadn't been the only one trapped within what was left over from the tragic sinking? Not much had changed from the last time Rosalee had visited the exhibit, but after everything she had gone through, she felt more connected to the passengers whose lives had been lost in 1912. She almost felt like she had known them all, even in passing. Rosalee suspected that was partially Emily's influence. Even though she wasn't really inside of her, there were still remnants of her memories, her emotions.

As they walked through the halls of the exhibit, Rosalee kept glancing in Bradley's direction. He hadn't been there before, like Rosalee, and the history behind everything was exciting him more than a normal man. That was part of the reason she loved him so much; he was so passionate about the history of places; even America, though he didn't come from the country originally. The way his eyes lit up and he was anxious to read the information attached to each item made Rosalee smile. She loved to see her man so happy; he was like a kid in a candy store—a free candy store. And although she

wasn't interested in all of history, there were a few moments that absolutely fascinated her—*Titanic*, *Abraham Lincoln's* presidency and assassination, *Amelia Earhart's* accomplishments and disappearance, *Natalee Holloway's* death, and more. She and Bradley may not have shared a love of history, but they did share a passion for things that intrigued them.

While Bradley read the plaque on one artifact, another item seemed to call out to Rosalee, and she made her way over to it as if by a force stronger than her own free will. The golden ring, tarnished and decrepit from years of being submerged with the wreckage, seemed to sing in sorrow, drawing Rosalee in even further. Some of the gemstones that had been sitting inside the casing had long since washed away, but the single emerald one that remained seemed to sparkle even beneath the crust that covered it. It seemed to be beating with the rhythm of her heart, and Rosalee knew it was the artifact she had been looking for. The plaque displayed in front of it only confirmed her suspicions. The ring had belonged to Emily Lancaster, and it had been reported that she had been wearing the jewels when the ship was pulled beneath the surface of the ocean.

The last time she had visited the exhibit, Rosalee had found the ring the most intriguing object on display. She hadn't known why before, but she'd stood and examined it for several minutes; enticed by its beauty. Rosalee's thought when she had first seen the ring was that someone had given it to a loved one, but to think that Emily's soul had been trapped in the jewel made the beauty of the ring turn to sadness.

Rosalee creased her brow, and examined the item closer. Since she hadn't touched the ring or done anything to disturb it in its glass case, she didn't understand how Emily's spirit had left the jewel and somehow entered into Rosalee's body. Some religions believed that spirit possession could happen through the iris of the eye; souls finding it a gateway to escape. But it was also believed that when ocular-spiritual-possession occurred, the host's soul takes the place of the

possessor, and since Rosalee wasn't trapped within in the emerald, it didn't seem plausible.

Bradley walked up behind her and placed the palm of his hand at the small of her back. "You know, it's been said that any disturbance of the soul's prison can set the spirit free." He leaned closer to the display. "See that crack in the jewel? If that had happened upon recovery of the item, Emily's spiritual form could have escaped."

Rosalee nodded, deep in thought. "But if that were the case, why would she have hung around for so long?"

"Spirits need something to attach themselves to or they vanish from the Earth. This exhibit and the ring were all Emily knew. To detach herself from the ring, and attempt to attach herself to something or someone else she didn't know was a risk she likely wasn't willing to take."

Rosalee looked over at Bradley and smiled sweetly. "You talk about her like she's still a human; like she has feelings, emotions, thoughts."

"She does," he stated, matter of factly. "Just because an entity leaves its human form, doesn't mean it loses all of its human attributes. Even after everything is gone—heartbeat, breath, life—our souls keep the memories of what and who we were. Emily might be a spirit of her former self, but she's still Emily Lancaster."

After giving the man she loved a light kiss on the lips in appreciation, she looked at the ring again. "Why did she choose me to finally take the risk to detach herself from the ring?" she pondered. "What was it about me that made her decide it was worth it?"

"I don't know; your fascination with the ship, the resemblance between you two...It could have been anything, but for some reason, she trusted you."

"I wish she hadn't."

"Rosa, you don't mean that."

She sighed. “No, I don’t, and I’m sorry I said it. But what if I screw something up? What if I can’t figure out how to release her?”

Bradley pulled her against his body and wrapped his strong arms around her. “You will, Rosa. You will.”

“Excuse me,” a worker interrupted. Bradley released Rosalee and looked toward the voice. “The exhibit will be closing in a few minutes. Please move on and complete your tour of the artifacts.” Bradley nodded. “Thank you, folks, and we hope you enjoyed this exhibit.”

“We did. Thank you,” Bradley responded as he urged Rosalee toward the exit. She looked back at the ring as they moved away, and Bradley’s heart sank. He knew Rosalee was conflicted over breaking the connection with Emily. To be honest, so was he, because he didn’t want to do anything that basically killed Emily all over again. But if it meant saving the woman he planned to marry, then he would do whatever it took to ensure Rosalee went through with it. “We’ll come back tomorrow,” he told her.

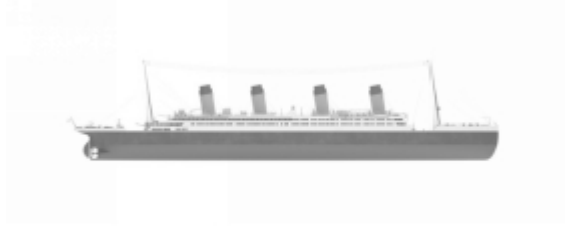
She nodded as they exited the exhibit. “Thank you for coming with me.”

He placed a finger beneath her chin and lifted her lips to his for a chaste kiss. “Always.”

Rosalee smiled.

“So, the exhibit might be closed, but the casino’s gift shop is probably still open,” he said, changing the subject before he took her right there in the middle of the casino floor. “Want to check it out?”

“Sure.”



Chapter Eight

Bradley's credit card had gotten a good work-out once they had scoured the entire gift shop. Rosalee had wanted to buy practically everything there; two of some things. And if there was one thing that had remained consistent in their relationship, it was the fact that Bradley had never been able to say no when his woman wanted something so much. But even with everything they had purchased, there was still one thing that Rosalee didn't have...yet. Once he saw it, he knew she had to have it, and he had sneakily asked the clerk to add it to their order and discreetly slip it into his bag. It wasn't replacing the other little object he had tucked away at home for when the time was right, but he knew Rosalee would love it.

With a smile to himself, he set the bags down on one of the beds in the hotel room. As he did, his stomach grumbled loudly, and Rosalee giggled from the other side of the room. Then her stomach responded, and Bradley chuckled. Apparently, they were both awfully hungry after their long flight and visiting the exhibit. But if Rosalee was as tired as he was, Bradley knew neither of them were in the mood to go out to a restaurant.

He lifted the room service menu and flipped through it. He hated making decisions, especially when it came to food, so he showed the menu to Rosalee and raised his eyebrows in question.

“Pizza,” she simply said.

And Bradley chuckled. He was thinking the exact same thing, and since they both loved the same toppings, he didn’t even need to ask what she wanted on it. He picked up the phone on the bedside table and dialed the front desk while flopping his large body on top of the mattress. After ordering their food, he kicked off his shoes and loosened the tie he was wearing.

Rosalee giggled at his antics, and he smiled. “Why don’t you join me?” he asked suggestively.

She swatted at him. “Not when room service could arrive in the middle of it,” she scolded.

“Awe, come on, Rosa. I can be quick, and I *know* you can be quicker,” he teased.

Again, she swatted at him, but joined him in the bed and snuggled against his side. That was his favorite position, and he pulled her in tighter and ran his fingers through her long hair. If he could spend eternity with Rosalee against his side and in his arms, he would give up all the basics of life—eating, working, etc. None of it would mean anything without the love of his life.

Bradley inwardly chuckled. It was funny how he was calling someone the love of his life. It wasn’t but a few years ago when he never thought he would be that type of man; never be able to love so unconditionally and completely. But ever since he’d met Rosalee, all of that had just vanished. It was like he had known her his entire life; he couldn’t believe he’d spent so many years without her in his world.

A knock sounded at the door, and Bradley sighed. Room service had horrible timing. After carefully detangling himself from Rosalee, he made his way to the door and took the pepperoni, bacon, onion, pepper, mushroom pizza from the woman standing on the other side. After paying the bill, and including a very large tip, he thanked her and closed the door once more. Placing the box with the greasy pie on the small

table, he opened the flap and inhaled the delicious scent of the artery clogging ingredients.

“Mmmmmm,” he hummed in appreciation. “My pizza smells good.”

Rosalee squinted at him in annoyance. “Back away from *my* pizza, *professor*,” she taunted.

Bradley flashed a sinister smile. “Oh, is the big bad private investigator using my profession against me? What are you going to do to stop me? Huh? Shoot me?” His smile grew. “Oh wait, you had to leave that home. Well, in that case...” he continued to taunt as he picked up the first slice of pizza and lifted it to his mouth.

Rosalee sprang from the bed and snatched the slice from his hand, stuffing it into her own mouth and chewing. Bradley raised his hands and chuckled, giving up the fight. After sliding another slice out of the box and onto the paper plates the hotel provided, he walked over to the bed and switched on the television. He’d flipped through three channels when Rosalee joined him on the bed and snatched the remote from his hand. Bradley shook his head and relinquished control of the television. Unlike most men, he didn’t need to hog the remote. Rosalee liked most of the same things as he did, so fighting over what to watch usually didn’t happen in their house.

Once Rosalee settled on a movie, the first slices of pizza were gone, so Bradley stood up to add more to their plates. “Should we order some wine?”

Rosalee nodded. “I’d love some.”

He ordered a bottle of red, and then sat back down with her on the bed. A chuckle erupted from his throat when he caught a glance of the movie Rosalee had chosen to watch; it wasn’t a big surprise. Rose was lying naked on the chaise, while Jack drew her figure on parchment paper. It was Bradley’s favorite scene in the entire film, and not just because

it involved a naked woman—like Rosalee accused. The only naked woman he was interested in was Rosalee.

Bradley smiled to himself as he went to receive the wine from the room service waiter, silently devising a plan in his mind to get Rosalee just that way; naked, and writhing beneath him as he brought her to the peak of ecstasy. Rosalee didn't scream when they made love, like people thought most women did, but it was okay, because she didn't need to. The pleasure emanated from her body in waves, and Bradley knew she was enjoying every moment of their time together. He didn't need her to yell his name for the world to hear. In fact, he preferred she didn't; the world didn't need to know. Sex was a private, intimate affair between two people; savored in whispered moans and heated embraces.



Chapter Nine

If sex were an Olympic event, they would have gotten the gold for sure. Because Rosalee didn't want to sleep—for fear of switching places with Emily and getting stuck in 1912, awaiting her doom—Bradley and she had participated in a sex-a-thon that lasted for eight hours of alternating between foreplay, intercourse, and make-out sessions when they both needed a break from the more aggressive acts. And, as the morning sun poked through the thick curtains, they both sat at the small table in silence, guzzling down an entire pot of coffee to supplement their energy.

They still didn't really have a plan as to how to break the connection, but Rosalee had been thinking ever since Bradley had been in the shower that morning. It seemed to her that the only recourse to figuring it out was for her to fall asleep and make contact with Emily. It was dangerous, and she would be risking her life, but it was the only way ... in her mind. Aside from breaking into the exhibit after hours and stealing the ring, only to destroy it to release whatever other-worldly hold it had on Emily's soul, there wasn't any other option. And while that would be a risk Rosalee would be willing to take, the exhibit was located in the middle of a casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. There was no such thing as 'after hours'. While the exhibit closed at a certain hour, the rest of the building did not, which meant there was too great of a risk of being caught before the mission was complete. Rosalee had to sleep; death be damned.

“Bradley,” she began, gently. When he looked up from his cup, she took a deep breath. “I have an idea.”

He sat back in his chair. “Oh?”

Rosalee nodded. “But you’re not going to like it,” she admitted.

Bradley smiled. “Somehow that doesn’t surprise me. What is it, Rosa?”

“I need to talk to Emily; I need to sleep,” she said in a rush, holding her breath for his reaction.

But he surprised her. “I agree.”

Rosalee’s mouth hung open. “You do?”

Bradley nodded. “I don’t like the risk it puts you in, but if we’re going to do this then it’s the only way. We’re basically fighting blind here, and if Emily knows something that could help us, then she’s our only help.”

Apprehension filled Rosalee as she walked along the deck in search of Emily. Unlike the other visions, she noticed her reflection in the windows she passed and realized she was in her own form. As she passed other passengers, no one spoke a word to her or moved away from her; it was like she was invisible. As a waiter passed with a tray of champagne, Rosalee realized she was invisible; only an incorporeal spirit passing through the night aboard the great ship. There was no beginning of explanation as to why things were different, and Rosalee didn’t have time to ponder the possibilities. The sooner she found Emily, the sooner she could wake up and free her soul.

She finally found her in the ship’s hold. After she maneuvered past all the passengers’ belongings including a few automobiles—so the rumors were true—she tried to gain Emily’s attention, but it was as if she didn’t even know Rosalee was there. That simple fact scared the daylight out of her. The passengers not seeing her was just different, but if Emily

couldn't see her... What did that mean for Rosalee? Had she died instead of simply falling asleep?

As she pondered the possibilities and felt her panic rise, a younger man came up behind her and whispered Emily's name. Emily turned around with a wide smile on her face, and then moved toward the man and practically floated into his awaiting arms. Rosalee creased her brow. Who was that man, and what was he doing hugging another man's wife?

"I want to show you something, my love," he said in his German brogue. At least, it sounded German to Rosalee. "Come," he urged as he led Emily away.

Rosalee followed them, curiosity getting the best of her. She knew she should try to get back to Bradley, if she still could, but a fury ran through her at the brazenness of the man. Did he think it right to touch a woman who was united with another? He'd called Emily his love, but Rosalee refused to believe that Emily had been having an affair. Her temper seethed as she walked behind them to the other side of the space, her eyes never leaving the man's palm rested against the small of Emily's back. But Rosalee was unsure whether all of her anger was directed at the man anymore. Emily had gone into his arms willingly, and hadn't made any attempt to shake off his advances. Perhaps she had been having an affair. But why? Everything Rosalee had learned about Stanley in the short period of time since the visions had started, had revealed nothing of concern about him. He seemed to be a normal man, loving husband, dedicated business man; what more could Emily have wanted?

Sympathy for Stanley washed through her as she watched the younger man open a box and pull out something wrapped in terry cloth. No one deserved to be cheated on. Even a scoundrel deserved respect at times. Unless they did something to jeopardize that respect, like abuse. Cheating was no better than being incompatible. To cheat is to hurt, and hurting anyone on purpose was wrong.

Carefully lifting each side of the cloth, the man revealed a beautiful jeweled crown. Embedded in the gold were tiny crystals that shone in the dim light of the area, surrounding several rubies and emeralds. It was gorgeous, and Rosalee had recognized it from the exhibit. It had been in the display case right beside Emily's ring.

"Oh, Frederick, it's stunning!" Emily exclaimed.

Frederick smiled. "I'm taking it to New York to learn more about it. Legend says that it, and the accompanying pieces..." He paused as he slid another cloth wrapped piece out. Rosalee and Emily both gasped when the gold ring was revealed. It was the same one that was on display in the museum. "...can be enchanted by true love to hold the soul of someone you cherish at the time of their death," Frederick continued.

"But why would you want to trap a loved one for eternity?" Emily inquired.

After Frederick put the jewels back, he brought Emily against him and kissed her. "Not eternity, my love. The soul is released by a counter enchantment right before the death of the one in possession of the jewels. It's not a trap, Emily; it's a way for two destined souls to pass into death together."

Emily didn't look convinced, but she nodded. "Do you believe the legend?"

Frederick nodded as a broad smile spread across his face. "And I've already enchanted the crown for my own soul."

"But how will you be released? Does someone know the counter enchantment?"

Rosalee leaned forward, listening intently. But before Frederick could supply an answer to Emily's question, Rosalee jolted awake.

"No!" she yelled as the hotel room came into view. "No, no, no, no!"

The bed dipped as Bradley sat beside her. “What happened, Rosa?”

She sat up with a sigh. “The same as always; more questions than answers.”

“Tell me,” his hands gently commanded. Knowing it had been a while since he’d used sign language, worry for the man she loved temporarily replaced the frustration the dream had created. She slid to the edge of the bed and faced him directly. Signing slowly, she asked if something was wrong. “Something is wrong with my hearing aid,” he hands moved again. “The battery might be going.”

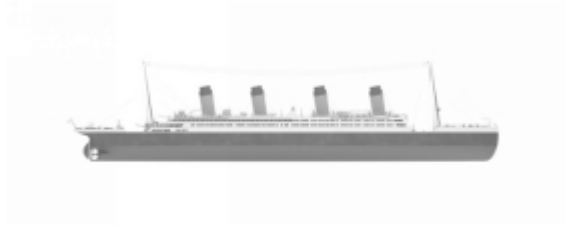
Relieved, Rosalee stood and walked to the mini-fridge to grab a bottle of water. After a long drink, she returned to the bed and told Bradley as much as she could. Having to use sign language made telling the tale more difficult, but she made sure to share the most important points. Once she was finished, she could see the frustration that matched her own on his face.

But then he stood up and pulled his tablet from his carry-on bag. “At least it’s more information than we had before,” he signed as the computer booted up.

“What are you doing?”

After fiddling with his hearing aid, he began to type. “If we can’t learn the counter spell from Emily and Frederick, maybe the jewels can tell us.” He typed for a few seconds. “You said Frederick mentioned a legend. That means there should be documentation of it somewhere.”

Rosalee smiled at her sexy history professor’s intelligence and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “I’ll order lunch.”



Chapter Ten

Hours of research hadn't revealed as much information as they were hoping, and they were just about to give up when Bradley suddenly yelled out. "Got it!"

Rosalee, who had fallen asleep a while ago, jerked awake beside him. He winced, feeling guilty over waking her up. He knew they both hadn't slept the night before, and any amount of sleep was a blessing. But, he was also glad he had woken her, because at least he knew she hadn't been pulled back to the ship and died. In fact, he'd been contemplating waking her, anyway.

"What is it?"

Bradley leaned down and gave her a quick kiss. "I'm sorry I woke you, but I finally found what we were looking for."

Once Rosalee sat up against the head board, hitting her head on the hard wood in the process, Bradley turned the screen toward her. As she read the legend out loud, he kissed her head where she had bumped it, and then turned on the suite's coffee maker.

"The legend of The Soul Jewels," Rosalee began. *"It is said that The Soul Jewels, otherwise known as The Eire Emeralds, can be enchanted to hold the soul of a loved one; only to be released when the enchanter is close to death, so both souls can leave the earthly plane together."* Rosalee

stopped and looked up at Bradley. “Well, that much we learned from Frederick. But at least we have this to back it up.”

Bradley nodded. “Keep reading,” he signed as the coffee brewed.

“*“The jewels can be traced back to 1883, and seemingly originated from Ireland’.*” That was surprising. If the jewels were from Ireland, how did a German get his hands on it? Bradley wouldn’t be surprised if it had been stolen. “*“How the jewels were created is unclear, but there are five known emeralds in the world. Theorists have claimed everything from mermaids to the stones being created by Merlin himself’.*”

“Merlin was a story, not a person,” he said, then winced. That was one thing he and Rosalee disagreed with, and they had agreed long ago to never bring it up. He turned to her and handed her one of the mugs. “Sorry.” Rosalee shrugged, but Bradley knew it had hurt her for him to dismiss something she believed in so passionately. He’d make that up to her later. “Does it say anything else?”

A deep sigh escaped her lips. “No, that’s it.” She began to close the browser, but then stopped. “Wait a minute.”

“What is it?”

“There’s an addendum at the bottom. *‘If any of The Soul Jewels are found please contact George Smith’.*”

Bradley looked at the screen and saw the email address just waiting for them to click on it. “Do it,” he told her.

Patience was never her strong suit. It had been almost four hours since they had sent the email, and Rosalee was going crazy waiting for a response. Even trying to work on her cases didn’t distract her enough to calm her nerves.

“Why don’t we go do some gambling?” Bradley suggested. “Get your mind off it.”

“I don’t know that it will work, but it’s worth a shot.”

Deciding to stay in *The Luxor* so they weren't too far from the room when Mr. George Smith sent a reply, they headed downstairs. There was always something so grand and mystical about casino floors. It was a feeling that was difficult to explain, but Rosalee's spirits seemed to always lift when she walked among the slot machines. Maybe it was the underlying hope that someone would hit the jackpot, or perhaps the adrenaline that coursed through everyone's systems. Either way, she loved casinos.

A passing waitress took their drink orders as they took a seat at a bank of machines. Rosalee put her money in the machine and absently made a bet. Her mind was still on the jewels and Emily. As she made another bet, she looked toward the large exhibit where she knew the jewels were resting. How could she concentrate on gambling when she knew Emily's soul still wasn't free?

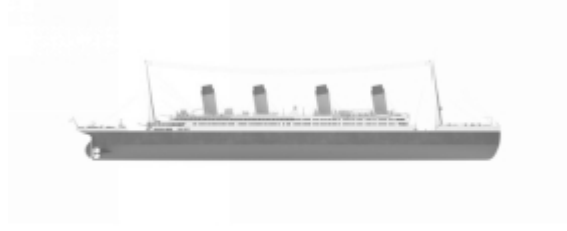
Suddenly, a loud alarm went off nearby. Rosalee whipped her head around and noticed the sound was coming from her machine. Lights were flashing, people were dancing on the screen, and her total was rapidly climbing. Too stunned to react, Rosalee just watched the numbers count while Bradley whooped beside her. She'd hit the jackpot! For how much, she wasn't sure, but she didn't care. She just couldn't believe it; she'd never hit a jackpot before in her life. Heck, she'd barely walked away with more than one-hundred dollars each time she played slots.

Once the money stopped rolling in, bells chimed and fireworks exploded on screen, and then a clerk came by to verify the win. Still reeling from the excitement, Rosalee hadn't even noticed the total. When she asked the clerk exactly how much the jackpot had paid out, Rosalee nearly fainted at the total. Thirty-three thousand dollars...

Amazing! Nothing could be better; unless a reply to their email came in right at that moment. Bradley's phone went off, and Rosalee had to chuckle. It wasn't likely that it was a response to the email, but the timing of the ring was ironic. Bradley ignored the call, and then sent a quick text off

to whomever it had been that called. Then he cashed out of his own machine and turned to Rosalee.

“Let’s celebrate!”



Chapter Eleven

Two shows and an incredible meal later, they were back in the hotel. Rosalee decided to hop in the shower while Bradley returned some messages and found something to watch on television. Las Vegas was nice, but the heat was unbearable. Her clothes clung to her like cellophane, and a cool shower was exactly what she needed. After peeling the clothes off her body and tossing them into a sweaty pile on the tile floor, she climbed into the glass shower and stood underneath the spray for several seconds before cleaning up and climbing back out. Wrapping a towel around her torso, she dried her hair and finger combed it to create natural curls. As she was finishing up, Bradley knocked on the door before entering. His eyes roamed her body for a moment, heavy with sexual hunger. Once he had made eye contact, Rosalee's skin has been flushed in arousal.

“We got a response,” he said quickly in an attempt to dispel the tension in the air between them.

And it worked. All thoughts of any kind of sexual encounter between them vanished as hope rushed through Rosalee. “And?”

Bradley smiled. “We’re in luck. He knew the counter spell.”

“Really?!” Rosalee screamed.

If she thought nothing could excite her more than winning all that money, she was wrong. Knowing the counter

enchantment meant they could finally release Emily. Emily could finally be free.

Bradley nodded. “Believe it or not, he’s a descendant of Frederick’s, and found his original notes on them after inheriting his house.” He paused. “There is one problem, though,” Bradley said, smashing Rosalee’s hopes in four simple words. She leaned up against the sink and waited for him to continue. “Mr. Smith said that whomever casts the counter enchantment has to be *touching* the stone.”

Rosalee’s face fell. “But it’s heavily guarded. How are we going to be able to touch it?”

Bradley walked over to her and cupped her chin in his palm in comfort. “I’m not sure, Rosa, but we’ll figure it out.”

With no real plan in place, they returned to the exhibit the next morning. They tried saying the enchantment without touching the stone, but, predictably, nothing happened. After an hour, they had exhausted all possible scenarios. But Bradley wasn’t about to give up. And he knew Rosalee wouldn’t either. They had to do whatever it took to touch the emerald long enough to say the words. As they stood there and pondered the possibilities, another couple came into the area, and a light bulb seemed to go off. Bradley pulled Rosalee aside and explained his idea, and after a quick kiss, she left him to execute it.

She sauntered up to the other man and began to flirt. Once he began to flirt back, Bradley inhaled deeply and mustered every ounce of jealousy he could. He walked over to them with purpose and pushed the man away, only hard enough to make a point. He didn’t want to hurt the man; it wasn’t his fault, after all. As Bradley had hoped, the man’s temper got the better of him and he pushed back, inciting a full brawl between the two men. Bradley purposefully steered him toward the displays of the ring and crown, all the while keeping up the pretense of a jealous boyfriend. Once the displays crashed to the ground and the glass shattered, Rosalee

quickly picked up the ring and muttered the counter spell. But nothing happened. Suddenly, on impulse, she bent down and picked up the crown as well, once again muttering the spell. All four of them were knocked to the ground when a powerful blast came from the jewels, and Frederick's spirit seemed to leap out of the crown's emerald.

Rosalee felt as if a weight had been lifted. She had hoped that meant that the connection with Emily had been severed, and her soul was able to freely move on. But if that were the case, why was Rosalee on board the Titanic once again? The ship was quiet, deserted, save for her and Emily, who was standing on the deck, looking over the side. The ship seemed to be docked, and Emily was staring at The Statue of Liberty. But how was that possible? The Titanic never made it to New York.

Rosalee walked up to Emily and leaned against the railing beside her. "She's beautiful, isn't she?" Emily asked of the statue. "I had always dreamt of seeing her in person. I wish I had made it; I wish we all had made it."

Rosalee's heart sank as she thought about all the passengers' hopes and dreams being dashed as the ship sank. She placed a hand on Emily's arm in what she hoped was a soothing gesture, and vowed to herself to do and see everything she'd ever wanted to before it was too late.

"Me too," she told Emily. "I'm sorry I couldn't save you all."

Emily turned toward her. "You couldn't change the past, Rosalee. I knew that, and I had accepted it. As horrible as it sounds, all of us who died on that day were meant to die. It was our destiny."

"But I don't understand. If you died, why are there records out there that say you survived? Why is your date of death actually 1942?"

Emily smiled sadly. “My husband, Stanley, was an amazing man. Even if I didn’t really love him, I’d never deny that he was a great man. When the ship went down, a young woman from third class had been trying to sneak onto a full lifeboat. When the crew member tried to push her off, Stanley stepped in and rescued her.” Rosalee smiled. That sounded like something Bradley would do. “When they had been rescued by the Carpathia, the woman had no identification. It turned out that she was a stowaway, and when she couldn’t be identified and no one claimed her, they were going to hold her for her crimes. Stanley claimed her as his wife and gave her my identification so she didn’t have to go through that after everything else.”

“But how do you know all of this?”

“I might be dead, Rosa, but I can still learn. As soon as I escaped that ring, I went to find Stanley. At that point, I didn’t realize how long it had been since the sinking, so I thought he would still be alive. When I discovered he wasn’t, I went to the cemetery on a whim and found ‘my’ grave. I was so confused, and lost, and I called out for Frederick, the man I really loved. He didn’t come, but Stanley did. He explained everything.”

Rosalee nodded, happy to have some answers finally. It made her sad that Emily had died that night, but the idea that someone else had been saved who likely wouldn’t have been otherwise made her happy. As Emily said, sometimes things happen for a reason. If Emily and the other passengers were destined to die, then perhaps the other girl was destined to live...and live a better life than what she had known. But one thing was still confusing her.

“If I wasn’t supposed to stop the sinking, why did we switch? Why was I on the ship?”

“It was the only way I could communicate with you. I had to show you everything you needed to know. But I wasn’t very good at this after life thing, so my messages always got mixed up. I’m sorry for that. And I’m sorry if I frightened you

with those words at the cemetery. You were never in danger, really. You were never really aboard the Titanic; that was just the only image I could conjure as a 'meeting place'. And those words were the last thing I heard before my death, so they seem to pop up everywhere."

Rosalee was relieved, though slight disappointment washed through her to know that she had never actually set foot on the deck of the ship with which she was most fascinated. "But what about the time in the hospital? Bradley said I had almost died."

Emily sighed. "I'm not really sure what happened there. Nothing about all of this is crystal clear to me. I know little more than you do, Rosa. But in the end, you're safe and you helped me escape that trap. Thank you."

Rosalee looked at Lady Liberty. "If the ship still sunk, how are we in New York? And where is everyone?" She was full of questions.

"Before I pass from the Earth, I am granted one final wish. This was mine. I wanted to not only see the statue, but also wanted to see what it would be like had we all made it. I watched as everyone left the ship and headed off to their original destinations. Families were happy, kids were amazed at New York, dogs barked, and conversation was lively. It was wonderful. Deep down inside, I knew it wasn't real, but I didn't care." She sighed. "I hope a tragedy like ours never happens again."

Rosalee contemplated whether she should tell Emily that the world had been filled with tragedies of several varieties in the last one-hundred plus years. Planes had crashed into the twin towers, ships had had troubles and people had died, and so much more. It was a world of death and destruction, but it was also the little things that had gotten everyone through those tragedies. Babies being born, marriages being created, historical moments...it all transpired to the general happiness of the human race. It all kept their hearts beating, and gave them a reason to live. Emily didn't

need to know about the rest; she just needed to know that life had gone on.

“Advances had been made, Emily. Ships are much more secure now, and thanks to your tragedy, regulations have been updated to make sure all passengers are treated the same, given the same, and saved the same. There is no first class, second class, third class any more. We’re all just treated as humans.”

Emily smiled wide as tears streamed down her cheeks. “Thank you, Rosa. That was exactly what I needed to hear. I never agreed with the way things were done back in my day, and I wish I had made more of an effort to change it. But to know that people have grown and changed is the best gift you could have given me.”

“What will you do now?”

At that moment, Frederick walked up beside Emily and wrapped his arm around her waist. Emily smiled up at him, and then they both looked at Rosalee. “ We will move on together and love each other as we should have been allowed in life. No judgment, no secrets, no conditions.”

Frederick agreed. “I won’t let anything stop me from showing my love for this woman every single second of our afterlife.”

Emily smiled sweetly as they looked into each other’s eyes. Rosalee felt a little awkward standing there as they shared an intimate moment, but the love she saw between them was worth being uncomfortable. Then they both turned back to Rosalee.

“Frederick,” Emily said, “this is Rosalee. She’s the one who released us.”

Frederick walked forward and held out his hand. Rosalee felt strange shaking the hand of a man who was long dead, but masked that and slipped her palm into his large one.

“Thank you for everything, Rosalee,” he said. Before Rosalee could say anything, he removed his hand from hers

and walked back over to Emily. Taking her hands into his, he looked her in the eyes. "Emily, my love, before we move on, there is something I must say." Emily nodded. "I am so very sorry for trapping your soul in that stone. I was caught up in the legend of the jewels and the idea that we could be together no matter what. I did not think about what it would be like inside those emeralds. I did not think that our souls would be aware that they were trapped within. I hope, my love, that you did not get harmed inside. To watch the world pass by inside those green prisons..." He sighed.

Emily stopped him. "I understand, Frederick. I do not blame you for anything. What you wanted to do for us, for our love, was honorable. Neither of us knew what would happen. But we are out now, and can be together. That is all that matters to me."

He nodded, smiled, and gave her a chaste kiss. "Shall we?" he asked after hooking his arm with hers.

Emily pat his arm. "In a minute," she told him as she looked back at Rosalee. He nodded and moved away a bit as Emily concentrated on Rosalee. Unexpectedly, she wrapped her arms around Rosalee's shoulders and pulled her in for a hug. Rosalee let a tear fall as she hugged her back. "Thank you, Rosalee."

Rosalee squeezed a bit tighter for a moment. "I don't know what I'll do without you. I'll miss you."

Emily lightly laughed as she pulled back. "You will not even remember me, my dear. Our time together will quickly pass, and you will spend years with that man of yours. Every night you'll sleep beside him, and every morning you'll wake to the sight of his bright green eyes filled with love. I'll be but a distant memory; something you know inside your mind, but cannot recall."

Rosalee shook her head vehemently. "You will always be a part of me, Emily. I will never forget you. After all, how could I? I'm in love with your husband's great-grandson."

Emily's shock was evident on her face. "I see," she said simply, likely at a lack as to what else to say. "Well, then if young Bradley is anything like his great-grandfather, you will cherish every second with him. In fact, your life with him will be even better than my time with Stanley; for you have the addition of true love behind your relationship. Hold it close, Rosalee, and never take it for granted."

"I won't." She looked over at Frederick, who was smiling from ear to ear as the woman he loved spoke. He knew exactly what it meant to have found true love. "You should go," she mentioned to Emily. "Move on to the next step in your existence...with Frederick."

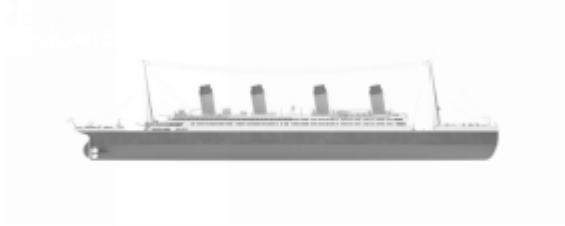
Emily slowly nodded. "Please know, dear Rosalee, I will miss you as well."

After another quick hug, the women parted ways. Emily began to walk off with the man she loved, but then turned back to Rosalee and smiled broadly as if she had a secret she was too happy to keep.

"By the way, congratulations," she said as she quickly looked down at Rosalee's torso.

What the heck did that mean?

She looked down at her stomach and wondered what Emily had been talking about. She was about to ask, but when she looked back up, both she and Frederick were fading. The farther they moved away, the more they disappeared, and Rosalee knew they were finally at peace.



Chapter Twelve

It had been weeks since they had gotten back from Las Vegas, and Emily was still on Rosalee's mind. She'd found out later that Frederick and Emily had met aboard the ship, and he had intrigued her so much that she had spent most of the trip away from Stanley, who had been spending it with business associates anyway, and Emily had fallen in love with Frederick in just two days. And that made her heart flutter with love. That kind of romance was the thing of novels, and the kind of love that every woman strived for in life.

But one thing Rosalee still didn't know was what the heck Emily had been congratulating her about. She still had no idea. Whatever it was, it had yet to reveal itself.

Nausea rolled through her stomach as she sat at her desk, updating her client files with the new information she had been able to unearth. Rosalee was really getting annoyed with the flu-like symptoms she had been experiencing ever since they had gotten back. At first, she had assumed it was just her body reacting to everything, but when the symptoms continued after the initial day back, she wondered if perhaps she had contracted the flu during their travels. But three weeks had gone by and the symptoms still hadn't completely dissipated. They had lessened, and weren't constant any longer, but when they did show themselves, they were quite a jolt to the system. Rosalee had never thrown up more in her entire life. She couldn't wait for the results to come back from

the doctor's office. She needed to know what was going on with her body and how to fix it.

At that moment, her office phone rang and she lifted the receiver to answer the call. "Good morning, Redford Investigations. How many I help you?"

"Ms. Redford, this is Doctor Twindle's office." Rosalee sat up straighter, hoping the test results had yielded some kind of explanation. It was sort of ironic that she had just been thinking about the tests before the phone rang. "Ms. Redford, are you there?"

Rosalee snapped out of her stupor. "Oh, yes, I'm sorry. Please go on."

She could hear the nurse smiling. "We have received the results to your tests, and we are pleased to inform you that you do not have the flu. In fact, you are not suffering from any kind of illness."

"I don't understand," Rosalee commented.

"Your symptoms are the result of morning sickness, Ms. Redford."

Shock radiated through her system. Morning sickness meant pregnancy. But how could it be morning sickness? It happened during all times of the day.

"But I don't just get ill during the morning," Rosalee pointed out.

The nurse chuckled. "Ms. Redford, there are a lot of myths when it comes to pregnancy. Morning sickness is not as it sounds; it can happen any time of day. The only reason it's called morning sickness is because it's *most likely* going to happen when an individual first wakes."

"I'm pregnant?" she whispered.

"Yes, ma'am," the nurse said cheerfully.

"But I...how?"

The nurse laughed lightly. “Well, it says here that you mentioned you had a long term boyfriend. Perhaps you should talk to him.”

Rosalee swallowed hard. Bradley. What would he think about her being pregnant with his baby? They weren’t even engaged to be married. There wasn’t even any unspoken promise of marriage. What would he say when he learned he was going to be a father? Would he even want the baby? Rosalee was officially freaking out.

After taking a deep breath and trying to calm herself down, she thanked the nurse and hung up. She looked back down at the client files in front of her, but everything was a big blur as confusion and surprise clouded her vision. When her intercom buzzed, signaling that her secretary needed to speak to her, she just stared at it like it was an alien that she had no idea how to confront. Everything seemed so foreign at that moment, like she had been transported to an alternate universe.

That thought reminded her of Emily, and suddenly, her parting words made all the sense in the world. Emily had known. She’d known that there was a growing fetus in Rosalee’s womb. That was what she was congratulating her for.

Rosalee placed her shaking hands over her stomach and closed her eyes. Nothing felt different inside, but the nausea had suddenly vanished. It was as if her body had accepted the diagnosis and was happy with the conclusion, no longer trying to rid her of the ‘virus’. Not that Rosalee felt a baby was a virus, but she assumed that was what her body had felt at first, and it finally realized that what had invaded her system was not a threat.

It was odd, but at that moment, Rosalee also knew it was the truth. She was pregnant, and she couldn’t stop the smile that spread across her face at the idea. She was going to be a mother, and that thought wiped the smile away just as quickly as it had come. How could she be a mother? She had no idea how to raise a child. She was the worst possible person

for the universe to choose to bring another human being into the world.

Her brain raced as she thought about everything that came along with having a baby. Diaper changes, 4am feedings, teaching the child to eat, sleep, talk, walk, potty training... How did women do it? How did a person care for another little person, and help them grow into a well rounded, respectful, intelligent adult? Rosalee had *absolutely no idea*.

The intercom buzzed again, and this time Rosalee answered. "Yes?"

"Your man is here," her assistant quipped.

Rosalee tried to swallow several times, but it seemed as if all the moisture had left her body; Bradley had bad timing. "Send him in," she croaked out.

The door opened immediately, allowing a smiling Bradley to walk into the office. "I brought lunch," he said with pride as he held up a pizza box. Rosalee smelled the grease and scrounged up her face. Bradley noticed. "I'm sorry, are you still feeling sick? I can take this away if it's bothering you."

Actually, she was starving, she realized. "No, it's okay," she told him with a smile. "Thank you." He set the box on her desk. "To what do I owe this pleasure? Shouldn't you be at school?"

Bradley suddenly grew nervous. He loosened his tie as he sat in the chair beside her desk. Rosalee was looking at him like he was the best gift she had ever gotten, and that made him worry that he wasn't. Could he live up to her expectations of him? Could he be the husband he had never expected to be? *No*, he chastised himself, *you are not going to chicken out. Do it. Propose. You love her. Ask her, you idiot.*

"Actually, I cancelled all of my classes."

"Why?"

“There was something I needed to do,” he told her, trying to stall until he could gain the courage he needed.

“Oh?”

He plated out two slices of pizza, and waited until they had both eaten a bit before continuing. “Rosa,” he began, “I’d like to hire you.”

Rosalee choked a little on her pizza, and coughed before taking a drink of water. “Oh?” she repeated.

Bradley nodded. “You see, there’s this woman I’m madly in love with.” Rosalee blanched, so he quickly continued. “Her name is Rosalee Redford, and I couldn’t live without her. But I find myself wondering if she wants everything that I do. So what I’d like you to investigate for me is whether or not you think,” he paused as he got down on one knee in front of her, “she’d like to become my wife.” Rosalee gasped. “Rosa, the love of my life, the keeper of my heart, the subject of my dreams, will you marry me?”

A tear escaped her eye as she slid from the chair and knelt on the floor in front of him. Bradley ran the pad of his thumb beneath her eye and captured it. He hoped it was a happy tear, but Rosalee had yet to say a word. For a moment, he worried she would say no.

She kissed his cheek. “I don’t have to investigate. I already know the answer. I love you with everything I am, and I wouldn’t want any other husband in the world. Yes, I will marry you, Bradley Commun.”

Relief and joy washed through him as Bradley took the diamond ring out of his pocket and slid it on her finger. He hadn’t brought it out before then, because he wanted the proposal to concentrate on Rosalee and the love he had for her; not the ring. But as he slid it over her knuckle and placed it where it belonged, he realized how much he loved seeing the ring he picked for her resting against her beautiful skin.

“I love you,” he told her as they embraced.

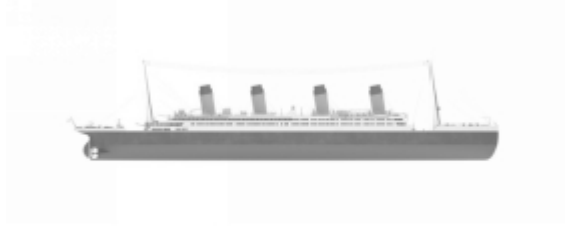
“I love you, too.” Rosalee cleared her throat. “But there’s something I have to tell you.”

Bradley’s heart sank, fear ever present in his heart. “What is it?”

“I…” she hesitated.

“Tell me, Rosa. Whatever it is, I’m sure it’s not that bad.”

“I’m pregnant.”



Epilogue

8 months later...

“Custody granted.”

Elation filled Rosalee as the judge banged his gavel and granted full custody of the twin boys to Bradley. They had been working hard for a long time for that moment. After everything Bradley had gone through with his own mother, the last thing he wanted was for his sons to grow up feeling their mother didn't love them as much as she did the bottle. And now they wouldn't have to.

The judge hadn't said, but Rosalee had a feeling that her recent nuptials with Bradley had played a factor in his decision. The boys having two parents instead of one was an advantage. Plus, they had recently bought a home big enough to accommodate them all; the boys wouldn't even have to share a bedroom. And Rosalee had made the difficult decision to become a stay at home mom. It was hard to give up her investigation business, but she didn't trust a nanny or daycare center to take care of her child, so after all of her recent cases had been solved, she made the public announcement that she was leaving the business in the capable hands of her assistant, whom had just passed her own P.I examination. She would miss the job, but everything else was falling into place, and that made it worth it. It had been the right decision, even if she had doubted it at the time.

Once everyone had been dismissed by the judge, Rosalee stood up to join Bradley. But as soon as she did, a sharp pain radiated through her abdomen and water gushed to the floor. Rosalee called out in pain, and Bradley came running to her side.

“What’s wrong, Rosa?”

“My water broke,” she told him.

“You mean the baby’s coming?” he said in a panic. She nodded, and he led her to the car. “Let’s go; we have to get you to the hospital.” After she was settled in the car, he shut the door and leaned in through the open window. “Just give me one second, okay?” She nodded again. “Breathe, Rosa, like we learned in class.” Unable to say anything through the pain, she just nodded once again. Bradley walked over to his ex-wife and his twin boys. “Anna, I am trusting you to get the boys to my house by Monday with all of their things. I’m allowing you to have one final weekend with them, because you are their mother and they deserve that time with you. But if you do anything besides give them the love and attention they deserve for the next 48 hours, I will not hesitate to have you dragged to jail for child neglect. Understood?” Anna nodded, but said nothing. Rosalee knew that she was aware that if she spoke a word, it would be worse off for her with Bradley than if she stayed silent. “Good.” He turned to the boys. “I love you, my boys. But I have to get Rosalee to the hospital so your new baby sister can be born. Will you be okay?”

“We’ll be fine, Dad,” Travis, the more mature one, said. “I’ll take care of Chris,” he added as he slung his arm over his twin brother’s shoulders. “Go.”

Bradley nodded and pulled them in for a quick hug before jogging back to the car and sliding behind the wheel. As another contraction played out, he grabbed Rosalee’s hand and took off. The ride to the hospital was painful as contractions assaulted her abdomen, and Rosalee squeezed Bradley’s hand as hard as if she were crushing walnuts in her

fist. But it didn't help. Rosalee had never felt a pain so intense in her entire life. She thought it had been an exaggeration when their Lamaze teacher had explained how much contractions hurt, but she owed the teacher an apology. If anything, what she had described was an under-statement. Another sharp pain radiated through her as Bradley pressed his foot a little harder on the accelerator and swung into the hospital's parking lot.

"Don't worry, Rosa; we're almost there," he soothed as he rounded the car and helped her stand from the passenger seat.

Rosalee said nothing, but concentrated on her breathing as they slowly made their way to the door. As soon as they walked inside, a nurse saw them and rushed over to them with a signal to an orderly to get them a wheelchair. As soon as she was seated in the chair, they rushed her to a room with Bradley following quickly behind.

Hours later, after a difficult and painful delivery, Rosalee woke to the sound of soft humming. Most of the day's events were a blur, except the one thing she really wanted to forget; the pain. But then she heard her daughter's cooing and decided she would endure the pain hundreds of times over for little Emily. She turned her head toward the window next to her bed and watched as Bradley stared down at their newborn daughter, humming softly to keep her from crying. It was a sight to behold, and one that she would never forget. Out of everything that had ever happened to her, nothing could top the sight of seeing the man she loved holding a baby that shared their DNA.

Rosalee still couldn't believe she was a mother. And she still had huge doubts about her capability as a parent. But in her heart, she knew one thing for sure. She would love her daughter with every fiber of her being. Nothing could make her love her less. If she grew up and decided she was homosexual, Rosalee would love her daughter-in-law. If Emily

wanted to be an artist, instead of a lawyer or doctor or teacher, then she'd decorate her house with her baby girl's paintings. Whomever Emily grew up to be, she would always be Rosalee's child. And a true parent accepted their child for what they were and what they were to become. She and Bradley may not always be perfect in their parenting methods, but it was a learning experience that Rosalee was excited to begin.

And the first step was holding her beautiful daughter.

"You're awake," Bradley said with a smile as he walked over to the bed and placed the baby in her arms. "It's time you officially met our daughter, Rosa. Emily, say hi to your beautiful mommy."

Cradling the small bundle in her arms, Rosalee looked down into her daughter's bright eyes, and her own eyes immediately welled up with tears. She was gorgeous. No baby was ever more spectacular than Emily Rosa Commun. As she stroked her velvety cheek, she allowed the tears to fall. She didn't know how it was possible, but she already loved her child more than she had ever loved any other being—even Bradley, who leaned over them and pressed his lips to little Emily's forehead.

"She's perfect," Rosalee whispered.

Bradley smiled, and then pressed his lips to Rosalee's forehead in the same gentle way he had their daughter. "Just like her mother," he charmingly responded. "Speaking of the mother of my child," he continued, pulling a small box from his pocket. "She deserves a reward for giving birth to the angel which became our daughter."

After passing the baby back to him, Rosalee picked up the box. What it could be, she had no idea, because she already wore a diamond engagement ring and golden wedding band on her left hand. Of course, just because it was a small box didn't automatically make it a ring; it could just be a beautiful pair of earrings or a small charm to commemorate the birth of their baby.

“What is it?” she asked her husband.

“Open it,” he urged.

Anxiousness surged through her veins as her nerves sizzled with anticipation. She loved getting gifts, almost as much as she loved giving them. Usually she was so curious about what was inside that she pondered about it for minutes instead of opening it and finding out. This time, however, she had decided to forgo all that and just open the box. The hinges creaked as the lid was lifted, but no sound came from Rosalee as her eyes set on the beautiful ring. It was identical to the one that had been Emily Lancaster’s, except it was crafted to look the way it had when it was new. The emerald shined brightly against the golden setting, and the rubies on either side of it contrasted it perfectly.

Rosalee looked into Bradley’s eyes, silently asking him what the ring meant. “I got it at the gift shop in Vegas,” he told her.

“But why did you wait all this time to give it to me?” she questioned.

Bradley put the baby back in her bassinet, and then sat back down beside Rosalee. “Even though the connection is broken between you two, Emily will always be a part of you, Rosa. We even named our daughter after her.” He took the ring from the case and slipped it on her right hand. “But memories fade, and moments in our lives become only stories. So no matter how many years pass, how many adventures we have together, how many times the story is told, the days you spent connected to Emily will never change. And every time you look at this ring,” he lifted her hand, “you’ll always remember the friend you had in Emily Lancaster’s soul.” Bradley kissed her and pulled her into his arms. “You may not have known her as a person, but sometimes knowing a person’s soul is knowing a person’s true identity. You knew the true Emily, and the true Emily would have wanted you to have this.”

He kissed the ring, and then placed a chaste kiss atop her hand. Rosalee said nothing, choked by the tears clogging

her throat. Everything he said was true. Emily Lancaster would always be a part of who Rosalee was, and she would never give that up for the world. However, even though she was glad Emily's soul was free, she did miss her friend. If it was possible, Rosalee hoped she paid a visit every now and again. Because, unfortunately, there was no train to Heaven that boarded at the number eight platform.

The End

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About the Author

I'm just a small town girl with a heart for the country life. I'm very shy and pretty much a loner, but my writing helps me be more outgoing and talk to various people that I would otherwise have a hard time approaching. I don't write for the money or the fame, but rather to tell a story that needs to be told; whether that is my story or a character's story. As a lot of people know, from my various interviews, I started writing to express my anger and hurt over the bullying that I experienced in High School, but eventually I just realized that I loved to tell stories. I was born in Texas, grew up and still live in Upstate New York, and want to retire in Ireland.



Photo Credit : Jill Cadena David

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