**Chapter 1**

"I love you, Jack." Rose clutched Jack's hand, clinging onto the board with the other, the chilly sea of water surrounding them.

"Don't start with your good-byes! We're going to survive this! You're strong, Rose and we're going to get through this no matter what!" They clung to wooden board, using it to support their bodies from the frigid water slapping against the sodden wood. Jack's teeth chattered and he hoisted himself onto the board, icicles clinging into his brown hair. Rose continued to sit atop the cold wood. Blowing air through his lips, he continued clutching Rose's hand, finally pulling her into his arms. He kissed her red hair, closing his eyes. *Lord, please let us survive this ordeal.*

The twosome clung to each other as the water continued to churn around them. He sniffed, hoping by clinging to one another, they could somehow get warm from their body heat. He closed his eyes, feeling himself drift away from his surroundings. "Jack, I'm scared." Rose's voice interrupted his slumber and he struggled to open his eyes, gazing into the face of the woman he'd grown to love in just a few days' time.

His head felt so heavy. He leaned toward Rose, continuing to hold her in his cold arms. His chattering teeth and his fatigue weighed him down. Taking a deep breath, he told her the truth. "I'm scared too, but, we'll get through this."

His eyes became heavy, feeling as if a ton of bricks rested on his eyelids. No longer able to fight the sensation, he drifted off into oblivion, still clinging to Rose, hoping their shared body heat would give them a way to survive in this cold, vast ocean of water.

The deep pierce of a whistle startled Jack. Sluggishly, he blinked his eyes open, spotting Rose in the distance blowing a whistle. One of the lifeboats had come back! The dull pounding of his heart continued amidst the frigid water that continued to bounce against his numb skin. Jack closed his eyes, no longer having the energy to stay awake.

Jack opened his eyes, gazing around the white, crowded, sterile-looking room. A multitude of cots lined the hardwood floor. He looked up, spotting the small round window in front of his bed. Vivid blue water churned and he squeezed his fists, struggling to recall where he was. He blinked before he spotted Rose. She sat on the floor beside his bed, leaning forward onto the mattress, her long, beautiful red hair spilled onto the snow-colored bedspread. Blinking, he touched his head. Pain radiated from his brain as fast and intense as a raging fire. Wincing, he raised his hand, caressing Rose's hair. She jerked up, her jade-green eyes wide, her full lips dropping open when she spotted him. "Jack!"

"Rose…" He licked his cracked lips, realizing his tongue was so dry that it almost stuck to the roof of his mouth. He clutched the bedspread, confusion sweeping through him like a tidal wave. "My head hurts." His rough-sounding voice startled him, and it almost sounded as if he were a different person. "Where am I?"

Rose grabbed his hand, her broken, jagged nails biting into his skin. "Jack, you're in the infirmary on the ship, Carpathia. We were rescued after the Titanic went down." She stroked his forehead, her cool fingers bringing relief to his heated skin. "You passed out right before we were rescued." He managed to open his eyes again to stare into her lovely face. Tears slipped from her green eyes, sliding down her cheeks.

"Ah, Rose." He winced, the pain coming in another wave. "Don't cry, Honey."

"Jack, the doctors didn't know when you'd wake up. I was worried." Her velvety soft voice lowered. "I thought we might lose you."

He squeezed her hand, trying to fight another wave of pain. "My head hurts so bad."

She returned his squeeze. "I'll go and find the doctor."

He managed to take a deep breath, not wanting Rose to leave his side. "No, just stay here for a minute."

Jack blinked, still trying to take everything in. He tried to swallow, but, his throat and mouth were too dry. Taking a deep breath, he finally spoke. "I need some water."

Rose released his hand, grabbing the plastic pitcher of water beside his bed, pouring the liquid into a small cup. The sound of the liquid hitting the cup soothed his frazzled nerves. He tried to grasp the cup, but she shook her head, still kneeling beside him. "Sit up, and don't try and drink too much water too soon. The doctor said if you drank too much water too quickly, you might vomit it back up."

Still dazed, Jack glanced around the room, noting several other people in the makeshift infirmary. Some of the other patients struggled to sit up, too, and others stood by, watching patients, almost as if they were willing their loved ones to wake up. Questions popped into his brain as fast as popping kernels of corn and he wasn't sure which question to ask first. He closed his eyes, again fighting another searing wave of pain. He finally managed to push himself into a sitting position, his muscles screaming with pain. She placed the cup to his lips and he drank a few sips, wanting more liquid to ease down his parched throat. "Remember, you need to drink this slowly," commented Rose.

Jack managed to drink two cups of water before the doctor entered. His white uniform blended in with the white sheets and blankets used in the infirmary. He bended down, placing himself in front of Jack's cot. "Well, Jack, I see you've woken up." The doctor was tall and lean, and the kindness shining from his gray eyes automatically made Jack feel at ease.

Jack touched his head, wincing at the pain, about to speak, before Rose's sweet voice filled the room. "Doctor, he has a headache."

The doctor nodded. "Not surprised. That blow he got to the head would cause anybody to have a headache."

"Blow?" asked Jack.

The doctor nodded, taking his stethoscope, checking Jack's vital signs. "Yes, you were accidentally hit in the head with an oar while we were rescuing you, and now you have a headache." After the doctor was finished checking Jack's vitals, he poured some green powder into a cup, before filling the container with water. "Drink this. It'll help with your headache."

Jack grabbed the cup so fast, that a bit of the liquid sloshed out of the cup, splattering the snow-white blanket with a green stain. He guzzled the foul-tasting liquid, desperately hoping the concoction would help ease the pain of his headache. Once he was finished drinking the liquid, Rose removed the cup from his fingers and the doctor made his way to the next bed. Rose grasped Jack's hand, and he found comfort and warmth from their entwined fingers. He laid back onto the soft pillow, blinking rapidly. A myriad of thoughts plagued his mind, vividly recalling the shouts and screams of those who'd been drowning when the Titantic sank invaded his brain. He blinked, and his heart skipped when Rose swiped his cheek. She leaned toward him, her lilac scent invading his nostrils. "Jack, what's wrong?"

He tried to shake his head, but sluggish fatigue invaded his body like a tidal wave. "Nothing's wrong," he mumbled.

"Yes, something's wrong." She paused, again swiping his wet cheek. "You're crying," she whispered, her beautiful jade eyes filling with tears.

Jack remained silent, clutching Rose's hand, allowing the medicine that the doctor had given him take effect on his raging headache. Taking a deep breath, he finally spoke. "Did a lot of people die?"

Rose finally nodded, and she remained silent for so long, he wondered if she was going to give him other details. "Over four hundred people died."

Wincing, Jack clutched her hand. Her soft skin was like a soothing balm against his palm. He blinked as the waves of pain in his head faded*. Lord, why did this happen? Why did so many people die, and yet I was able to live?* He recalled the people in steerage, remembering some of the children he'd befriended while he was on the ship. Realizing that the lifeboats mostly picked up the upper-class passengers, he figured that most in steerage had died. "Fabritzio?"

Tears cascaded down Rose's cheeks. "I'm sorry Jack." Without her having to say the words, Jack realized his best friend was dead. Unable to control himself, his tears increased, and his body shook. Shaking, he cried as Rose held him, providing a solid rock of support. He held her body in his arms, again relishing her female scent and her vivid red hair. She finally pulled away, handing him a square cloth of material to wipe his runny nose. He blew his nose, still reeling from the pain of the events over the last day.

Finally, his tears spent, Jack relaxed against the pillow in his bed, staring at the white ceiling, clutching Rose's hand. There had to be some goodness left on this earth – there had to be something he could do to make himself feel better. Wretched, devastated and depressed, he recalled his last moments with Rose before he passed out. "You said you loved me."

A smile flitted across her lips, and, amidst his feeling of devastation and depression, he found his heart rate increasing. He loved the fire and spirit that Rose possessed. He loved everything about this passionate woman and he'd do everything in his power to make sure she didn't have to suffer anymore than necessary. "Yes, I love you, Jack, I do."

He finally allowed his dry, cracked, bleeding lips to emit a small sad, desperate smile. Releasing her hand, he caressed her cheek. Several tendrils of her fiery hair spilled onto his hand and he fought the urge to kiss her. "I love you, too, Rose."

The doors to the infirmary burst open and Cal, Rose's former fiancé, strode in, his hair tangled and his dark eyes gleaming with anger. Jack swallowed, realizing that Cal must've overheard them through the thin, wooden doors. "Love?" The word oozed from Cal's lips with hatred. He rushed over to Rose, jerking her off of the floor, grabbing her arm, before his hand slammed against her cheek with a strong slap, forcing her head to jerk to the side. Tears cascaded from her eyes and a red welt now marred Rose's skin.

Hot, vivid contempt fed through Jack's veins. Using all his strength, he struggled to get out of bed to help Rose, but the room swayed and he fell back onto the cot.

Cal spoke through clenched lips. "You can't get away with this!" Cal cursed, raising his hand to strike Rose again before she stomped on his foot and spit in his face. The thick, bubbly spittle dripped down Cal's perfectly-shaped eyebrows while his eyes continued to blaze with anger. His tailor-made expensive dark dinner jacket was ripped and the black threads dangled from the garment. Jack groaned, longing to punch Cal in the nose.

Jack again struggled in the bed, trying to throw his blankets off so that he could fight Cal, but his arms weighed heavy, as if a bunch of bricks rested on his limbs. The fuzziness in his head increased, making it harder to stay awake. He blinked, opening his mouth, uttering the first thing that came to his mind. "Stop…Cal." He managed to speak in a sluggish voice before everything went black and he passed out.

**Chapter 2**

My face burning with pain, I dropped to the floor beside Jack's cot. I pulled him into my arms, enjoying the feel of his corded muscular body. "Jack," I whimpered, glancing around the crowded infirmary, seeking the doctor who had treated Jack earlier. I kissed Jack's cheek. I ignored Cal. Cal stood beside me looking like a stupid, wounded fool with spittle running down his face.

Cal jerked my arm, forcing me to stand. I yelped as pain sliced down my shoulder. I opened my mouth, yelling. "Stop!"

He leaned toward me, his breath tickling my ear while he spoke. "You little whore." He dug into my arm with his fingers, and more pain traveled down my bicep. I squeezed my eyes shut – there was no way I was going to let Cal know that he was hurting me. I hated this man, I loathed him and all I wanted him to do was leave me alone forever. "I want my necklace back, now." The Heart of the Ocean was Cal's engagement present to me – it was a necklace that had a huge blue diamond and I didn't want Cal or his dumb gift.

"I don't have your stupid necklace."

Continuing to hurt my arm, he spoke. "Don't lie to me you little tramp. I'll do whatever it takes to get my necklace back."

Gritting my teeth, finding my inner strength, I stomped on his foot again. He cursed, raising his arm to slap my face, but, I refused to cower. I stared into his dark eyes, almost daring him to strike me again.

"You got some trouble over here, lassie?" The deep Irish brogue of another man interrupted our argument. The brawny man sported a cap and his thick, muscular arms stretched the fabric of his white shirt.

Grateful for the interruption, I shook my head. "I think Cal was just leaving."

Still glaring at me, Cal backed away toward the door. "I'm not finished with you. I want The Heart of The Ocean and I'll do whatever it takes to get it back." He glanced at the Irishman who'd come to my rescue. "That woman is a thief. You need to stay away from her." And then, Cal strode from the room.

Exhausted, mad and worried, I again sunk to the floor beside Jack, stroking his face. The Irishman knelt down beside me. I glanced at him, noticing the wrinkles lining his tanned skin. If my father were still alive, he'd probably be around the same age as this man. "Thanks for helping me."

"Looked like you didn't need my help, after all. You seemed like you could handle that man pretty well by yourself." I kissed Jack's cheek, still wondering where the doctor had disappeared to. "My name's Liam," he said, offering his hand.

"My name is Rose." I shook his hand, again grateful for his help. "I'm so sick of Cal."

"He seems to be a terrible sort of lad, hittin' on a woman. Who is he to ya?"

I blinked, wondering if Liam really needed to hear what I had to say. I didn't want to ruin this man's day talking about Cal. "He used to be my fiancé."

"Used to be?"

"Yes." I shook my head. "It's too complicated to explain."

"Well, I'm a passenger on the Carpathia and I'm helping the doctor out with his patients." He gestured toward Jack. "Is he okay?"

"He passed out when Cal attacked me. I don't know what to do." Liam touched my shoulder briefly. "I'll go and find the doctor for ya. Just hold tight for a second." Liam left and returned minutes later with the doctor. He again pulled out his stethoscope and checked Jack. He also opened Jack's eyelids, checking his pupils.

"He'll be fine. That medicine I gave him was pretty strong. He'll probably be asleep for a few hours." He looked at me, his gray eyes shining with compassion. "You look like you could use a rest yourself."

Liam still stood beside the doctor, nodding. "Yes, I think the lassie does look tired. You got circles under your eyes as big as coins."

I looked at Jack, stroking his face. "I can't leave him."

Liam patted my shoulder before speaking. "I can tell you care about the lad there," he said, gesturing toward Jack. "But, what would he want you to do? Would the lad there want you to stay here with him, awake, or would he be wantin' ya to get some rest in a good bed?"

Suddenly, the pain and anguish over the last day came crashing upon me. Vivid memories of the churning cold water, people sobbing, people drowning, the ship sinking…I shook my head, turning away from Liam and the doctor, ashamed of my weakness. I couldn't stop the tears that gushed from my eyes and my bones were so tired. I dropped to the floor, sobbing, clinging to Jack. Liam touched my shoulder. "Lass, you need to rest."

"But, what about Jack? I don't want to leave him."

"There's a private room near the infirmary. You can use that space to rest. It's reserved for staff, but, I be feelin' that you need some privacy about now." Liam stood, still speaking. "Your Jack would want ya to be nice and strong and well-rested when ya arrive in New York."

Finally, I took Liam's advice. I stood, my legs feeling shaky like gelatin. I leaned against the wall and the doctor approached. "I have a pill that I can give to you so that you can relax and get some sleep."

"Okay," I nodded. Most of the survivors from steerage were grouped together in some cabins in the bottom of the ship. I had not been able to get down there since I'd spent the entire time with Jack. Still feeling sluggish, I accepted the pill the doctor offered. I would take it once I got to my room. Liam touched my elbow, gesturing toward the swinging door. "Come on, I'll show ya where the spare room is." I shuffled a few steps before stopping. "What's wrong, lassie?" Visions of Cal, sneaking into the infirmary to hurt Jack in the middle of the night invaded my mind. I could imagine him clutching that cold metal gun, wanting to kill Jack. I shook the thought away. If Cal shot Jack, he'd be caught immediately. After all, we were in the middle of the ocean on a ship and he couldn't escape.

Turning toward Liam, I voiced my thoughts. "I'm afraid that Cal will hurt Jack."

He shook his head. "Don't be worryin' non about that, lassie. I'll be watching Jack for myself. I'll make sure that Cal won't bother him and I'll also let the doctor know."

Still feeling uneasy, I nodded, glad to leave the haunting medicinal scent of alcohol. I'd grown tired of smelling that odor while sitting in the infirmary with Jack. I allowed Liam to lead me out of the room, and the swinging wooden doors slapped shut behind us. I was surprised when Liam stopped a few feet down the lighted hallway, gesturing toward the closed door.

He opened the door and gestured me into the room. I stepped in, immediately liking the stark, plain, undecorated white walls. A simple bed rested in the corner and a small round window gave a nice view of the vivid blue ocean. There was also one wooden chair in the corner. Liam spoke. "I'll be right back." I turned toward him, about to ask why he'd be returning, but, he'd already left the room, his strong footsteps sounding down the hall.

Glancing in the corner, I noticed a large ivory pitcher filled with water and a glass stood beside the pitcher. I poured the water into the container, popped the pill that the doctor had given me into my mouth, then guzzled the liquid. The water rushed through my dry mouth, wetting my throat. A few drops strayed down my lips and slid down my neck. Eager, I poured another glass of water, realizing how thirsty I was. While I drank the second glass of water, Liam returned. He held a small paper sack in one hand and a wrapped square object in the other. "The passengers and the crew made a pack of things for each of the Titanic survivors. I don't think anybody ever gave you yours."

Puzzled, I accepted the sack, wondering what was in it. He then handed me the square-shaped, wrapped item in his other hand. "This is a sandwich for you to eat. I figured you were too tired to go with the rest of the passengers for your meal." Fatigue swept through me like a tidal wave and I wiped the water dripping from my mouth before accepting the sandwich. I doubted that I'd eat it right now. I just didn't have the energy to chew the food. Since my thirst was now quenched, all I really wanted to do was lie down and go to sleep.

"Thank you, Liam. You've been so kind to me."

He patted my shoulder before walking back to the door. "Let me know if you need anything. As soon as you wake up, you can come and check on Jack again." He closed the door behind him, and I heard his footsteps as he walked away.

Dropping onto the bed, I pulled off my filthy shoes, the stinking scent of my feet greeted my nose. I grimaced, knowing I needed to clean myself up, but, again, not having the desire or energy to do so. I wiggled my tired toes, staring at the paper sack on the bed. Curious, I opened it and found a clean faded nightgown, a cheap, dark linen dress, underwear, one pair of socks, a toothbrush, toothpaste, soap and a washcloth. I touched each item before pulling out the nightgown. Amidst the sinking of the ship and the rescue, my dress had been ripped. With shaky fingers, I tore off my ruined outfit before slipping the nightgown over my head.

Lying on the bed, I took the blanket and pulled it over my head. I was now completely covered and I breathed deeply. I couldn't stop the tears from falling as I cried myself to sleep.

*Frigid water surrounded me. Somebody grabbed my arm, desperately trying to use my leverage to stay afloat. Hearing the shouts and screams from the other Titanic passengers who'd been plunged into the ocean, I gasped for air, before I was plunged beneath the chilly water. My heart rate increased as I tried to breathe.*

My eyes shot open and I glanced around the stark white room aboard the Carpathia. Then, I spotted my mother sitting in the single wooden chair in the corner of the room. Her emerald eyes stared daggers at me, and I gritted my teeth, fisting the bedspread, trying to figure out how she'd gotten into my room. "Mother, what are you doing here?"

My mom didn't answer as she stood, walking toward the bed. She stared at me, almost as if I were foreign creature. "Rose, what am I going to do with you?"

"How did you get in here?"

"I went to the infirmary because I'd heard that ruffian you'd befriended was ill. I told that man…Liam that I was your mother and he showed me to your room."

I narrowed my eyes, sitting up in my bed. "That *ruffian* has a name and it's Jack—"

She raised her hand, and I wondered if she was going to slap me like Cal did. She slowly lowered her hand, as if she suddenly realized what she was doing. "Rose…" she shook her head, still staring at me as if I were an oddity. "Look at you, you look a mess." She sniffed, frowning. "You smell bad."

"Oh, mother!" I just wanted to wring my mother by her scrawny neck. I hated her. I hated her so much that I didn't know what to do about it. How could she be worried about the way that I smelled when over fifteen hundred people had died from the Titanic? "Don't you care that so many have died? I just woke up from a nightmare about drowning in the ocean." I shook my head, baffled by my stupid mother. "And the first thing you're worried about is my smell." I fought the urge to scream as I scrambled out of bed. I needed to get rid of my mother so that I could go and see how Jack was doing. I needed a nice, warm welcoming hug from Jack Dawson and I didn't want my mother's presence ruining that pleasure.

I sensed my mother's green eyes staring at me as I stumbled the short distance to the water pitcher. I poured the water into the glass, as I did so, the loose sleeve of my nightgown slid up my arm, revealing a huge purple bruise.

"What on earth?" My mother jumped from her seat so fast, you'd think her chair was on fire. "Did that hooligan do this to you? I'm going to have him arrested as soon as we're off this ship!"

I opened my mouth and yelled. "Mother! Stop!" My hands shook as I poured the water into the glass. I sipped the water, dropping back onto the bed. "Cal did this to me in the infirmary. He also tried to kill me and Jack while the ship was sinking."

"Don't lie to me."

"Mother, I'm not lying." I looked at my mom with distain. "You don't care about me at all. If I marry Cal, I'll be miserable."

"Humph. Cal told me you'd be lying about him."

Astounded, my mouth dropped open. "What?"

"He found me earlier today and told me that you'd been acting up again. He wants me to straighten you out and remind you about the wedding. He also told me you stole his necklace."

"I don't care about that stupid necklace!" I shook my head. Talking to my mother was like talking to a brick wall. She refused to listen and it was obvious that Cal had brainwashed my mother about me. "The Heart of The Ocean is probably is probably at the bottom of the sea right now. If Cal wants his dumb necklace back then he should go diving into the ocean to get it."

"Don't get smart with me young lady."

"Mom, get out of my room. If you don't get out, I'm going to scream. I've made a few friends on this ship and they'll come to my rescue."

Her mouth set in a tight line, my mother stood and walked toward me, lowering her voice. "I'll leave you be for now, but, you best remember that when we dock, you're getting off this ship with me and you're going to marry Cal."

I turned, looking my mother directly into her eyes, refusing to cower. "Get. Out."

"Oh!" My mother lifted her tattered purse from the floor and left the room on hurried steps, slamming the door behind her. I knew I'd made her angry – my mother never slammed doors. But, I knew I wasn't marrying Cal. The sinking of the Titanic proved something to me – the sinking proved that life was too short and I wasn't going to waste my time on this earth being married to an asshole like Cal.

My hands continued to shake and I closed my eyes, trying to force myself to calm down. I couldn't let Jack see me like this. He was already sick and I know he was still saddened by all the friends he'd lost from the sinking of the ship. I didn't want him to see me shaking, mad, and upset. After my shaking had stopped, I spotted the paper-wrapped sandwich on the nightstand. My stomach grumbled and a wave of pain shot through my brain, reminding me that I had not eaten since boarding the Carpathia.

Taking the sandwich, I unwrapped it. My stomach rumbled again, sounding like a crashing ocean in my abdomen. Taking a huge bite, I relished the salty taste of ham, mingled with the flavor of sweet pickles and spicy mustard. Ignoring the manners I'd been taught since I was a child, I licked my fingers as pickle juice spilled onto my hand. Continuing to eat the sandwich, I smacked my lips, chuckling, wishing my mom could see me now! She'd have a heart attack if she saw the way I was enjoying myself eating this sandwich. Shaking my head, I took the last bite. My mom hated it when I enjoyed my food.

Finally done with my meal, I stood, walking over to the nightstand, staring at my reflection in the glass. Lord have mercy, I looked a mess! My hair was tangled and I saw a few spots of blood in my scalp where my hair had been pulled out at some point during the ordeal. I sniffed. My mother had a point, I did smell bad. I smelled bad and I looked bad. "I have to look my best for Jack," I mumbled, pouring some water into the bowl. I then quickly went down the hall to the shared privey and got more water in another huge bowl. I lugged the bowl back to my room.

I unwrapped the bar of thick brown cheap soap, commencing my toilette. It seemed weird, doing all this stuff for myself without having a personal maid to help me. About an hour later, I'd freshened up and I now smelled slightly sweet. I'd found a small vial of rosewater in the corner of the sack that Liam had given to me. My long hair was now pulled away from my face with a dark band. I glanced at myself in the mirror. I didn't look great, but, at least I looked presentable.

I walked down the hallway, hearing voices from the floor above. I still had not mingled with other passengers very much since I'd been on this ship, I'd been so worried about Jack. I opened the swinging wooden doors of the infirmary, my nose assailed with the scents of alcohol and iodine. I looked toward Jack's bed, and gasped. *Jack's bed was empty! Had Cal gotten to him after all?*

**Chapter 3**

Sitting on the deck, Jack stared at the brilliant sun shining on the aqua blue water. The sea of liquid sparkled like tiny diamond chips. Taking a deep drag from his cigarette, he flexed his fingers, itching to get his hands on some charcoal pencils and paper so that he could draw. Finishing his cigarette, he threw the bud overboard, wishing Rose were nearby. Blinking, he enjoyed the warm sun on his face while watching several of the Titanic survivors cluttering the deck. He scanned the sea of faces, wondering if Cal would soon appear, trying to make Rose's life miserable.

He glanced toward the deck entrance, startled. Rose stood there, her emerald eyes filled with both warmth and sadness. Her beautiful red hair was pulled away from her face, accenting strong cheekbones and ruby red lips. He stood, wincing. His head still gave him some pain, but the doctor had told him this morning that it was a good idea to move around.

Rose strolled toward him, joining him at the railing. Pulling her lush body into his arms, he relished the feel of her soft skin. Jack sniffed, enjoying the sweet scent of roses that perfumed the air. Their foreheads touching, he smiled, briefly kissing her lips. "Hmm. You smell nice."

She returned his smile, pulling away from him, staring into his eyes. "Thanks." She paused, sadness marring her beautiful features.

Taking his index finger, he stroked her face. "Hey, what's wrong?"

"Everything. Jack, what are we going to do?"

"What do you mean?" Taking her hand, he led her to two empty deck chairs. Stroking her fingers, he waited to hear what she had to say.

"I'm talking about when we dock."

"Rose, I'm a survivor and so are you. We'll be okay."

She shook her head. "Cal is powerful. With his money and his connections…."

Jack scoffed. "Don't worry about Cal. He can't force you to marry him."

Still frowning, she looked toward the vivid ocean, and he sensed she was holding something back. "What's the matter? You're not telling me everything."

A large fly buzzed toward them, landing on Rose's cheek. She swatted the creature away, the loose sleeve of her gown shifted, and Jack spotted the bruise marring her snowy white skin. "Rose!"

Several of the passengers glanced their way, and he lowered his voice, pushing Rose's sleeve up. "This is awful." Narrowing his eyes, Jack gritted his teeth, trying to reign in his temper. "Did Cal so this to you?"

Rose looked away, toward the vivid blue water, as if she were ashamed. Jack softened his voice, desperate to make Rose feel better. "Well, did he do this?"

She finally turned toward him, blinking rapidly. Tears rushed from her emerald eyes and Jack took his finger and swiped her tears away. Taking her onto his lap, he kissed both of her cheeks. "Rose, I can't let him get away with this."

"But Jack—"

"No, I don't want to hear it. I know Cal's rich and he's got lots of connections, but, that doesn't give him the right to treat you like this." He softened his voice stroking her cheek. "Cal needs to realize that he can't do this to you."

Rose jumped off of his lap, and he immediately missed the warmth from her soft skin. Sighing, he stood, wondering why she'd moved so quickly. Before he could voice his question, she spoke. "I don't want to talk about Cal. Jack, the last few days have been awful. I've been having nightmares."

Jack nodded. "Yeah, me too." It was hard for him to admit how much the nightmares disturbed his sleep. Life was a precious gift and he wanted to enjoy each day to the fullest, however, that was hard to do when unpleasant dreams and thoughts dominated his mind.

"Let's just have fun, enjoying each other today. I don't want to talk about Cal, my mother, or anybody else unpleasant."

"Your mom survived?"

Rose nodded and a sheen of tears appeared in her green eyes before she quickly blinked them away. "Yes, but, I don't want to talk about my mother."

"You're hiding something. What is it?"

Rose shook her head and a few strands of her red hair escaped from her bun. "Like I said, I don't want to talk about anything unpleasant today. Let's have some fun."

Jack thought about it for a few minutes before speaking. "I know you want to have fun, but, won't Cal and your mom come down here looking for you today?"

Rose scoffed, plopping back down on the deck chair. "Are you kidding me? I doubt we'll see them until we dock. We're down here with the steerage people. My mom and Cal wouldn't be caught down here with us in broad daylight."

"But Cal came to the infirmary." He touched her face, relishing the feel of her soft skin. "I saw him try to hurt you."

Rose shook her head. "He's not coming back. He knows how I feel and I doubt he'd come back here since he knows I can't stand him."

Jack hesitated, sitting beside her. "Well, if you're sure…"

"Of course I'm sure. Now, let's walk around and have some fun."

Although Jack's head hurt off and on throughout the day, he still made sure he spent time with Rose without complaining. They walked around the deck, talking to anybody they could. Several people were still upset, crying over lost loved ones. Jack's heart pounded as his conscious filled with guilt. He still wondered if some of the other children on steerage should've survived instead of him. Rose picked up on his despondent mood and she touched his cheek. "Don't be sad, Jack. Remember, we need to have some fun before we dock!"

The Carpathia crew had set up a room with books and games for people to play. Rose selected a book and Jack tried to read, but, it was hard to concentrate on the words with his head hurting so much. They returned to the infirmary so that he could get some medicine. He wanted to lie down and rest, but sensed that Rose wanted them to spend time together. Returning to the game room, Rose continued reading her book.

He glanced around the room and noticed several woman and children playing board games, talking and reading books. The children's eyes were haunted with sadness and Jack desperately wanted to make them feel better. Soon Rose started reading aloud to him and he relished the wonderful sound of her sweet voice as she read from her novel.

Around lunchtime, Jack's stomach growled, announcing his hunger. Rose chuckled, and the sound of her laughter was like a warm balm to his shattered soul. The kind Carpathia crew members set up tables on the deck for lunch. The uniformed crew placed cold cuts, cheese, breads and hot stew on the tables. There were also urns of coffee and tea. When Jack had told the doctor that he'd been feeling hungry, the doctor had said that was a good sign he was recovering.

Together, they prepared their lunch plates. With their laden plates, they sat at a small table in an adjoining room with open windows, and Jack layered thick slabs of cheese and meat on crusty bread slathered with mustard. The fragrant beef stew smelled enticing and he dipped his spoon into the bowl and savored the tender meat comingled with the potatoes and gravy.

Enjoying the warm sunshine on their faces, he found pleasure in watching Rose enjoy her food. She bit into the sandwich, licking the mustard clinging to her thumb, abandoning her high-society table manners. She then ate two bowls of the tasty stew. Her sparkling emerald eyes met his, and he was glad when a hint of a smile teased her lips. "This food's wonderful, Jack."

His stomach rumbled, reminding him that he'd spent more time watching Rose than eating his food. Enjoying their meals, they continued to talk about happier times. He even told her how he and his cousins had fared when they'd taken their first fishing trip in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin when he was only five. "I caught this huge fish and it was so slimy, Rose!" Chuckling, Rose covered her mouth, and her delight was like a balm to his fractured soul. "My cousins couldn't believe it. My mom and dad were excited and they fried up my catch for dinner."

After spending the rest of the day together, Jack's fatigue returned with a vengeance. They returned to the infirmary and before kissing Rose's scarlet lips, he dropped onto his cot, exhausted.

After sleeping for several hours, Jack awakened. He blinked, opening his eyes, gazing at the sea of bodies still covering the floor of the infirmary. A small light showed on the clock in the corner. It was ten thirty. He recalled on the Titanic that Rose told him that Cal and his friends stayed up late smoking cigars and drinking brandy, talking about business. He stood, blinking rapidly. His head still felt a bit fuzzy, but he balled his hands into fists, punching the air, imagining himself punching Cal in the nose.

He glanced around the infirmary, noticing the doctor was busy with a patient. He figured the doc would want to know how he was feeling, but, Jack didn't have time to talk. It was time for him to take action. He fled through the thin, swinging wooden doors into the lighted hallway. He walked down the hallway and up the steps. He noticed several passengers sitting around talking. After snooping around for a while, he finally hit the jackpot.

He peeked into the small round window in the center of the door, ecstatic he'd found the right room. The burgundy walls were graced with tiny white lamps. Large lighted chandeliers dangled from the ceiling and throngs of well-dressed men cluttered the area. Card games were being played at the tables as gentlemen took their wagers. Several of the patrons puffed on large expensive cigars. A few of the men smoked thin cigarettes, sipping from glasses of brandy. He looked around the room until he spotted Cal standing in the corner, laughing! He held a drink in one and he smoked a cigar. His eyes were half-closed and Jack figured Cal was drunk.

He flexed his fists, eager to take a swing at that man. He paced in the short hallway outside of the room. Cal didn't even look sorry about what he'd done to Rose. He'd hurt her, and if Rose had married that lout, he would've been hurting her every day, abusing her. Jack groaned, leaning against the wall, trying desperately to control his anger. Cal needed to be taught a lesson. Just because he was rich, that didn't give him the right to abuse a woman.

Frustrated, he banged his fist against the wall, wincing from the pain. Jack longed to march into that room, grab Cal by the collar and drag him out and make him fight like a man! Jack glanced into the room again, knowing he'd be outnumbered. He had to wait patiently until Cal left, he'd then apprehend him and make him suffer for his actions.

He closed his eyes, recalling how happy and carefree he'd been before the Titanic sank. He'd loved his life as a drifter, and now, he was, standing in the hallway of the Carpathia, upset and miserable because he didn't want his beloved Rose to suffer anymore.

"Well, I'll be, Jack, what in tarnation are you doin' in here? I didn't realize you'd made it off the ship."

Hearing the familiar voice, Jack opened his eyes, staring into the face of the Unsinkable Molly Brown. "I made it off the Titanic, but barely." He told her about the lifeboat coming back to rescue him and Rose later.

"Well, thank the good Lord that you're alive."

"I'm glad that both Rose and I survived." He paused for a few seconds before voicing his question. "What are you doing here, Molly?" He gestured toward the closed door. "This looks like a men's place to socialize."

"Humph." She paused, looking at him from head to toe, her eyes narrowed, as if suspicious. "Don't need to worry about why *I'm* here. Why are *you* here?"

"Molly…"

"I can tell you're fixin' to get into trouble."

He shook his head. "I'm doing what's right."

She sighed, grabbing his arm. "Come on, I think we need to talk."

He pulled his arm away, refusing to go with her. "No, I'm not going anywhere." He gestured toward the room, his heart racing. "Cal's gotta pay for what he did to Rose." In a rushed voice, he told her about the bruises on Rose's arm. "There's no way he's getting away with hurting my woman."

"Oh, you men, you need to learn to control your temper."

"Cal can't hurt Rose and he needs to understand that."

She shook her head, the feather in her hat bobbing with the movement. "Don't get into a tizzy over that. I know you like Rose and all-"

"I don't *like* Rose. I *LOVE* her. Cal can't hurt her anymore. He needs to understand that it's wrong."

Molly shook her head. "You need to cool your heels for a minute. Don't go starting a fight with Cal. You don't understand that he could ruin you. Just leave him be and you and Rose can enjoy your time together…forget all about Cal." He did know about Cal's power. Jack glanced at his wrists. He still had scars from the handcuffs that had been placed on his hands after Cal had arranged to have him falsely arrested for stealing that stupid necklace! However, after he was done with him, Cal would be too scared to do anything else to hurt Rose.

Molly was insane if she thought he was going to forget about the way Cal treated Rose. "No, I'm not doing going to cool my heels. I'm going to stay here and wait for Cal to leave, then I'm going to grab him and teach him a lesson."

Groaning, Molly touched his shoulder. "Look, how do you think Rose feels about this?"

Molly's dark eyes pierced into his and he turned away, knowing that she'd hit a nerve. If Rose discovered that he planned on ambushing Cal, she'd have a fit. She'd do whatever she could to convince him to leave Cal alone. Jack tossed the thought out of his mind like dirty dish water. In this case, neither Rose nor Molly knew best. He knew what needed to be done. He had to fight Cal, man to man, so that Cal knew whom he was dealing with.

"Rose can't stop me and neither can you. I'm going to fight Cal as soon as he walks through that door."

Molly dropped her hand, but her eyes sparkled with anger. "We'll just see about that. I like both you and Rose. You've got a good heart, Jack and I'd hate to see you ruin your life by getting into a tiff with Cal." She took a few steps away from him. "I'm going to go and find Rose. I'm sure she'd be interested in knowing what you're up to."

Jack shook his head. "No, don't go looking for Rose."

"I will. I'm going to go and ask around and I'm gonna find her. If I can't stop you from making a fool of yourself then maybe she can stop you." Soon, Molly's heavy, quick footsteps sounded in the hallway and Jack gritted his teeth, determined to get this over with before Molly returned with Rose.

Shortly after Molly took her exit, the door swung open and Cal sauntered out of the room, alone. He was still grinning like a stupid idiot and his steps faltered. He glanced toward Jack and stopped, his dark eyes narrowing. "What the hell are you doing here? You know this section is for the wealthy people."

Incensed, Jack grabbed Cal, slamming him against the wall. Cal widened his dark eyes, and for a moment, revenge pinged through Jack's veins. "I don't want you hitting on Rose again. If you ever hurt her again, you'll be sorry."

The tinkle of draining liquid echoed in the hallway and a putrid odor filled Jack's nostrils. He looked down, spotting the wet stain on the front of Cal's pants. Cal explained, his face reddening. "I was on my way to the privy when you slammed into me."

"Oh, my goodness!" Rose's sweet voice clamored from behind him, making Jack wonder what he'd gotten himself into.

**Chapter 4**

I couldn't believe it. Cal had peed in his pants and his face flushed red as a ripe tomato. Jack's mouth dropped open, and I could tell he was shocked, too. The Unsinkable Molly Brown stood beside me, her loud, violet-scented perfume making my nose itch. I sneezed, trying to get ahold of myself as I approached Jack and Cal. Cal narrowed his dark eyes, leering at me from head to toe. "You little slut." His slurred voice echoed in the hallway, and I smelled alcohol on his breath.

I finally spoke. "Cal, you've been drinking again."

He cursed, drool dripping from his mouth. I turned away, repulsed. Cal sometimes drooled when he was stinking drunk. That's just another thing on my list that I hated about him. His dark, tousled hair hung loose on the top of his head and it appeared he'd borrowed a suit from another passenger. Cal now sported a smart-looking chocolate brown suit with a vest. Whomever Cal borrowed his clothing from would be mad when they saw that he'd peed in the loaned duds.

Cal pursed his lips, glaring at me. "Who cares if I've been drinking!" He gestured toward Jack, and I longed to go into Jack's muscular arms for a nice long hug. I needed Jack's support, but, I knew if I went to Jack, Cal would act even worse. "You and him, you guys better be careful."

Jack stormed toward Cal, but, I gripped his shoulder before he could reach him, pulling him aside. "No, Jack. Don't fight Cal. He's drunk."

"Rose, I know he's drunk." He looked away for a few seconds, his hands balled into tight fists. "But, I have to teach him a lesson. He needs to know that he can't hit you." Jack's voice softened and he took his finger and caressed my cheek. "He needs to know that he can't disrespect you like that." Jack's soft touch made my stomach feel as if it were exploding into a million little happy butterflies. I'd only known this man for a short time, but, each day, he amazed me and I was determined to make sure our future was happy.

Cal's slurred voice interrupted our conversation. "You two…" He shuffled toward us, reeking of urine and alcohol. "You two better watch out. I'm gonna kill you both. You just wait and see." His voice boomed in the corridor before he shuffled out, using the wall to help him keep his balance.

Once he was gone, I shivered, scared. Jack pulled me into his arms and his mouth crushed against mine. The kiss deepened and my heart rate increased before Molly's sensible voice interrupted our kiss. "You two better watch your backs."

Jack glanced at Molly, his beautiful lips frowning. "I told you not to go and get Rose but you did it anyway."

Molly stomped over to us, her eyes flashing with anger. "Good thing I did. No telling what you would've ended up doing to Cal if Rose hadn't stopped you."

I gazed into Jack's eyes and nodded. "She's right, Jack. We need to be careful. Cal's already tried to kill us once. If he wants us dead, he'll stop at nothing until he's succeeded."

Molly spoke. "What do you mean he's already tried to kill you?"

I told Molly that Cal tried to shoot us while the Titanic was sinking. Molly gasped. "Well, I'll be. You guys need some serious help. I'll be prayin' for both of you, but, in the meantime, I'll see what I can do to help you guys."

Jack took my hand and squeezed it. "What do you mean?" he asked.

Molly explained. "You guys need some serious help gettin' off this ship. Once we dock, I figure Cal's gonna call out to the authorities and do whatever he can to mess you two up. Trust me, he's got money so he's gonna try and interfere with your lives."

I nodded. "She's right, Jack. You need to listen to her." I loved Jack so much that it hurt. He was smart, handsome, adventurous, and happy. It was like he was in this state of wonderful euphoria and I just wanted be with him forever and never have to worry about my terrible, selfish mother or Cal ever again. But, although Jack was smart, he was sort of naïve. He truly didn't understand the power that people had when they had money. As far as I knew, Jack had always been poor, so he didn't understand how rich people would go to extremes when they wanted something. If Cal was too cowardly to kill us himself, he'd hire somebody to do it. "Remember that Cal has already tried to frame you for stealing The Heart Of The Ocean and you were arrested on the Titanic."

Jack squeezed his eyes shut, turning away for a few seconds, as if ashamed. "Yes, I remember," he muttered, as if coming to terms with the power that Cal yielded since he was so wealthy. I gazed up at Jack and noticed the dark circles beneath his eyes. I long to kiss him again, and as my belly unfurled with desire, I realized that it had been awhile since we'd made love. I again wondered what would happen when we docked. How would we take care of ourselves? Jack leaned against the cream-colored wall and touched his head.

I squeeze his hand. "Does your head hurt?"

He nodded. "I need to lie down."

Molly clutched her hands together, her face filled with worry. "I think you two need to get back to the infirmary. I think Jack needs some more medicine. I'll come by later on to see you."

"Thanks, Molly," muttered Jack as we held hands, walking away. We were silent as we approached the stairs. Slowly, we climbed down the one flight of steps and a few minutes later, we swung open the wooden doors to the infirmary. Seeing Jack's empty cot, he dropped into it, pulling me down beside him. He pulled me into his arms, his lips pressing against mine. "I'm sorry, Rose," he muttered.

I blinked, again gazing at the most amazing man I'd ever met. "What are you sorry about?"

"I'm sorry that I didn't knock the daylights out of Cal. He hurt you, Rose and when Cal hurts you it hurts me." He cradled me in his strong arms as he raised the sleeve of my gown, showing the deep purple bruise that Cal had given to me. "Any man that treats a woman this way doesn't deserve to live. I love you, Rose and I want you to know that I'd never treat you like this."

I took a deep breath, resting my head against Jack's chest, enjoying the closeness that we shared. The antiseptic and alcohol stench of the infirmary made my stomach clench with dread. I saw a few cots where some really sick people were lying down. Some of the survivors were suffering from hyperthermia. I'd heard one of the Titanic survivors had died earlier that day and I hoped and prayed that none of the other survivors would lose their lives.

Soon the resonance of Jack's deep, even breathing sounded beside me, and I assumed that he'd fallen asleep. However, I realized I was mistaken when he spoke. "I know you don't want to marry Cal, and that you can't stand him."

I gritted my teeth, burrowing my body deeper into Jack's arms. "I HATE him."

"Well, I wondered, did you ever dream about the day when you would get married, like, when you much younger?"

I smiled, pleased and touched that Jack had asked this question. "I used to daydream about getting married all the time, especially when I was a little girl."

"Really? What did you daydream about?"

I sighed, wondering if Jack really wanted to hear all about this, but, since he'd asked, I figured he really did want to know. "I guess you realize that I'm not very close to my mom."

He chuckled softly and when his fingers stroked my hair, my heart skipped. "Yeah, I kinda figured that out for myself."

"Well, when I was growing up, my mother didn't really pay much attention to me. She thought I was a nuisance."

"Rose, that's awful." His wonderful voice was filled with sympathy, and I was glad that he felt bad about what I'd gone through as a child.

"Jack, it was awful. My mom always treated me like some possession. She never treated me like a daughter." I took a deep breath, revealing stuff about myself that I hadn't talked about in a long time. "I was really close to my dad. I know that he loved me and being loved is important to a child."

Jack gave me a short nod, agreeing with my statement. I was about to ask him how his relationship was with his parents before they died, but, he spoke before I could ask. "Did you spend lots of time with your father?"

I smiled, recalling the happier times of my life. "Oh, yes!" I then proceeded to inform Jack about how much my father meant to me. I blocked out the other patients, the doctor, the nurse, and even Liam – whom I saw from a distance, ceased to exist as I told Jack about the wonderful relationship I had with my dad. I imagined that Jack and I were in our own little world while I spoke about my father. "It was perfect, and I think my mom was jealous that my dad doted on me so much. When he died it was so awful, and that's when I realized my dad wasn't so perfect after all." I then told Jack about my father's gambling habit. "His gambling caused our financial ruin, and my mother made me agree to marry Cal. After my dad died, my wedding dream was ruined."

He squeezed my body in his strong arms, planting another kiss on my cheek. "Tell me about your wedding dream."

Closing my eyes, my voice turned dreamy as I told Jack about the wedding I'd been dreaming about since I was a child. I mentioned the large church, populated with tons of wedding guests. I then mentioned the peach-colored dresses that my dozen bridesmaids would wear. I told him all about the music that could be heard from the five-piece band that would've been hired to play for the event. My voice became mesmerized as I told Jack about my dress. "Oh, Jack. My dress would be vivid white with lace and tiny roses etched into the material. I'd have a long, flowing train and I'd be the most beautiful woman in the room." Taking a deep breath, I mentioned that my groom would be dressed in a snazzy black and white tuxedo and that the kiss we'd share after our vows would be exquisite.

Chuckling, I continued to tell of my dream wedding. "Afterwards, me, my handsome groom, and the rest of the wedding guests would feast on oysters, caviar, crabmeat, and large succulent tender steaks." My voice continued to be filled with animation as I relayed my dreams to Jack. "Then we'd have wonderful potatoes and vegetables and for dessert…." I gasped, my dream wedding really taking root in my tired brain. "For dessert, there would be lovely white vanilla wedding cake. The frosting would be decorated with bright crimson roses and everybody would have a slice, and they'd know that it would be the most wonderful cake in the world."

Jack smiled as I told my dream, but, I sensed his smile was etched with sadness. His wonderful lips drooped at the corners and I wondered what was wrong with him. "What's the matter, Jack?"

He shook his head. "You need to finish telling me about your dream wedding."

"Well, after the wedding, the guests would throw rice at us. Afterwards, my groom would take me in our fancy car to our new, expensive home. He'd present me with a huge wooden box, carved with roses." Sighing, I continued to speak, finding comfort in Jack's strong, capable arms. "I'd keep my wedding dress and other memories from our wedding, other memories from our wonderful life, in this beautiful wooden box." I sighed, gazing at the white ceiling. "I used to spend hours daydreaming about this when I was a kid." I sighed, reality setting in like a cold, wet blanket. "But, now, all of that has changed. My dad is dead, my mom and I are destitute, and she wants me to marry Cal." I shivered, and Jack tightened his arms around me. "The day that my mother announced that she wanted me to marry Cal - that's the day that a deep dark depression entered my soul. My life changed and I was really sad when my dad died, but, when my mom announced my impending marriage to Caledon Hockley, that's when I felt that there was no hope for me." Tears slid down my cheeks as I gazed at Jack. "As you know, that's why you saw me trying to jump overboard. Marriage to Cal would be worse than a prison sentence." I paused, snuggling up to my beloved man. "But, being with you, Jack, is like a warm balm on an open wound. You make me feel good and I love you." I sat up for a few seconds, pressing my lips to Jack's mouth, enjoying the taste of his tongue against mine. I then relaxed back on the mattress, inhaling Jack's wonderful scent, enjoying his mesmerizing company.

Startled, Jack cradled Rose's soft, lush body into his arms, closing his eyes. How in the world was he going to be a good husband, a wonderful mate to her, when there was no way he could fulfill her dreams? She wanted a large, exquisite church wedding filled with blessings. Instead, she was getting a wanderer who barely had a few cents to his name.

Rose's deep, even breathing sounded beside him, signaling that she'd fallen asleep. He loved this woman with his entire being, however, he didn't know how he could support her – he didn't know how in the world he could prove to be her Prince Charming.

Even if they were to wed and be together, how would they live? He was a wanderer, a drifter, and she was a spoiled, pampered beautiful woman that he'd grown to love in just a short period of time. How in the world would she learn to live in his poor world? Would she be able to adjust without having servants or fancy clothing? Did she even know how to cook a good meal?

He blew air through his lips, continuing to think.

Thoughts of Cal Hockley slammed into his brain like a sledgehammer. Would he really try to kill them again? If so, how would he do it? Recalling Cal following him and Rose on the sinking Titanic made worry rush through his brain like a tidal wave. Cal wanted him dead. Cal wanted Rose for himself, or, if that wasn't possible, he wanted to kill her, too.

Rose's deep, even breathing continued. A tendril of her fiery hair fell across her snowy white cheek. He brushed the stray strands of hair away, kissing her face. There had to be some way to protect her from the clutches of evil Cal Hockley. Rose had suffered enough in her life, and she deserved to live the rest of her days full of happiness and love – his love. Jack needed to let Rose know how much he did, indeed, love her. He swallowed, continuing to stroke Rose's vivid hair, staring at her beautiful face. *Lord, what am I going to do? I need to protect Rose from Cal but I don't know how. Also, I don't know what to do about Rose's wedding dream. I want to marry this crazy, wonderful, stubborn, brave lady, but, I have no idea how to make her dream wedding come true. If we ever get married, can she learn to be happy being married to a poor artist who can barely make a living?*

Continuing his silent prayer, he stroked Rose's face, mesmerized by her beauty. Taking a deep breath, he recalled Molly's offer. Molly wanted to help them, but, Jack realized that she may have been speaking without really thinking things through. What could Molly do to help him and Rose? He figured they had two people that they needed to worry about: Cal and Rose's mother. He figured Rose's mom would want him out of the picture so that Rose would still marry Cal and secure their financial future. Tightening his hold on Rose, he spoke aloud. "Lord, why, does everything have to be about money in this world? Why can't those without any money be happy with whomever they choose to marry?"

He squeezed his fingers, again wishing he had some pads of paper and some pencils to draw. Drawing soothed him, and being stuck on this ship without his art supplies made him feel like a caged animal. Closing his eyes, he stroked Rose's body with his fingers, imagining the pictures he wanted to create on creamy white pieces of paper. As the vivid images scrolled through his mind like a movie, an ear-splitting shriek echoed in the infirmary, ending his reverie.

**Chapter 5**

I opened my eyes, the loud shriek grating against my eardrum. I sat up on the pallet, Jack's arms still around my tired body. Staring at the woman sitting at the end of the infirmary, my heart melted. Sobbing, the woman clutched a man's hand. The man whose hand she held was laid out on a mattress. The doctor and Liam rushed over to her, and Liam looked away, his eyes meeting mine. He shook his head, tears pouring from his eyes. The doctor took a white sheet and covered the man's face.

Wincing, I turned away, no longer able to look at the sobbing woman. I'd met her briefly during my time on the Carpathia. Her husband had made it off the Titanic but was suffering from hypothermia.

Now he was dead.

The poor woman had confided to me that she didn't know how she'd be able to make a living for herself if her husband died. I shook my head, sadness overwhelming me. Jack kissed my ear. "This is so awful," he mumbled, glancing at the sobbing woman. The doctor was trying to talk to her and I figured he'd be giving her some medicine to calm her down.

I sighed. "I know, it is pretty awful." I took a deep breath. "Jack, I just don't understand this. Why did the Titanic go down? Why didn't Mr. Andrews develop a ship that had enough life boats for everybody to survive?" I'd taken a tour of the Titanic with Cal, my mother, and Mr. Andrews. Mr. Andrews had said that they didn't want to place enough life boats for all because then the deck would be too cluttered. The whole ordeal had been such a waste. Now, most of the survivors' lives had been affected by this disaster, including mine.

"I don't understand either, Rose. I've been asking myself the same question since the ship went down." We sat in silence for a while, Jack holding me in his arms. The doctor had given the woman some medicine and she now lay upon another mattress, sobbing quietly. I'd thought about going over there and comforting her, but, I doubted that there was anything that I could say to make her feel better.

"How does your head feel?" I asked Jack, touching his forehead.

"I feel more normal today. I think I'll be alright." He paused, taking my hand into his, toying with my fingers. "Are you hungry?"

"No." Food was the last thing on my mind. Seeing that woman's husband die just depleted all of my energy. I just wanted to curl up with Jack on this pallet and go back to sleep. I gazed out of the small round window that was in front of the room. Rain splattered against the glass, making me feel even more miserable. I had a bad case of the blues and my problems seemed to multiply if I thought about them too much.

Jack stood, pulling me up off of the mattress. "I think we should clean up and eat something. We need to decide what we're going to do."

I frowned. "What do you mean?" What was there to decide? After all, I'd already told Jack that when we docked I'd be getting off of the ship with him.

"Rose…" His voice sounded so tired. "We have lots of things to discuss."

I shook my head, refusing to move as Jack tried to pull me to the door. "Like what?"

"We can talk about that later. Let's get cleaned up and let's eat before we talk about this." He glanced at the rain-splattered window. "We'll be docking sometime today. We have a lot of stuff to talk about before then."

Grumbling, I followed him into the hallway. After we'd cleaned up at the privy, we met in the room where the Carpathia crew served breakfast. Heaping platters of eggs and biscuits rested on brown wooden tables. The scent of heated bread and butter filled the room. I sniffed. The food smelled heavenly. Crowds of hungry people huddled around the tables and I spotted several women, looking sad and tired, and, again, I wondered how they'd take care of themselves since their men were now dead from the Titanic sinking.

I was about to head to the food when I spotted my mother and Cal in another doorway across the room. They didn't see Jack and me, so, I pulled him back into the hallway, looking through the window in the center of the door. My mother and Cal refused to enter the room, but they stood at the door, looking at the huge crowd, probably searching for Jack and I. My mother's jade-green eyes were full of distain and I shivered, wondering what she would say when she saw me again. "Rose, what's wrong?"

Still staring through the window, in a rushed voice, I told Jack about Cal and my mother looking for us. I stared at his handsome face, touching his cheek. "It'll only be a matter of time before they find us and start making demands." Cal still thought that I'd stolen his dumb, expensive necklace, and my mom would die if I refused to marry Cal. Finally, Cal threw his hands up into the air and he exited the room with my mother.

Jack and I rushed into the room amidst the crowd. After piling our plates with food, we stepped out of the room and into the hallway, sitting on the floor. Although I wasn't hungry, I forced myself to eat since Jack said we needed to talk about something important after we'd eaten our meal. The light, fluffy eggs and buttered biscuits melted on my tongue, and I found myself enjoying the food even though I didn't have much of an appetite. We washed our simple meal down with hot cups of black coffee.

We then re-entered the mess hall to leave our dirty plates in a huge bin. We were about to exit before we were interrupted. "Well, I'll be. Here you guys are." Molly Brown rushed toward us. "I've been looking for you guys all over the place."

"You're not the only person looking for us," Jack mumbled, dumping his plate into the bin. It clattered against the other plates and utensils. I knew he was referring to my mother and Cal. What would they do when they found us?

Molly stared at us, her hands resting on her ample hips. "Look, I think I've found a way for you two to leave this ship without being bothered by your mother and Cal."

My mouth dropped open as I stared at Molly. "What do you mean?"

She glanced around the room. "I don't want to talk about this here. We don't have a whole lot of time. Come with me to my private room so that we can talk."

I thought about the private room that Liam had kindly acquired for me. I had not used it last night since I didn't want to leave Jack. I was thinking we could go in there to talk, but, I figured my mother and Cal would just find me in there and harass me. We were about to leave when one of the Carpathia crewmembers approached. The small maid smiled, showing a dimple in her left cheek. She clutched a paper package. "Rose, I need to speak with you for a moment."

I gasped, wondering if my mother and Cal had sent this girl in here looking for me. Before I could speak, she pushed the brown-covered package into my hand. "You were wearing this coat when you were rescued. It's torn and tattered, but it can still be worn. We hung it out to dry and cleaned it the best we could." The small woman touched my arm. "I know a lot of the people who survived don't have a whole lot of possessions left, so, we figured you might want the overcoat back."

Barely giving the package much thought, I accepted it, wanting to get out of this room before Cal and my mother returned, searching for me. I figured they'd already been to my room and they'd probably already looked for Jack and me in the infirmary. If we went with Molly to her room then we'd at least have some free time to talk about what was on Jack's mind. "Thanks for bringing this to me."

Remembering my manners, I decided to say something else. "Also, I want to thank you and the rest of the staff for taking care of us." I swallowed, suddenly becoming emotional as I again thought about the shipwreck. My eyes teared up, but the maid touched my hand.

"It's okay. We're glad to do it." She left, leaving me holding the brown package.

Molly grabbed my arm. "You two better come on. I need to talk to you before we dock."

Pushing thoughts of the maid from my mind, I clutched my package as Jack and I followed Molly down the long, well-lit hallway. We climbed a few sets of stairs. "We don't need to be takin' the elevator. I figure if your mom and Cal are lookin' for you two, then they'll be lookin' on those elevators," Molly advised. As we got closer to Molly's cabin, I touched the suede brown walls and noticed the tiny lights in the hallway. Our surroundings had turned more luxurious and I figured Molly had spoken to the captain and he'd arranged for her fancy room. After all, Molly's name was famous enough that the captain was probably sure he'd get the funds for her room.

She opened the door, gesturing for us to enter. I wondered if Cal and my mother had quarters near Molly's room. I figured they were staying in a room located in this fancy hallway. The thought made me shiver and Jack pulled me into his arms, kissing my cheek. "Are you cold?"

I shook my head. "I'm scared, Jack."

"Don't be scared. You're strong, Rose, don't forget that. We'll get through this."

Molly walked over to a tray piled with little cakes and there was also a small pot of tea sitting beside it. The teapot looked lovely. It was etched with bright blue roses, and I immediately recognized the teapot as a fine, expensive piece of china. Glancing at Molly's dresser, I noticed expensive jars of cold cream, moisturizers and face cleansers. I longed to use some of those fine things – my skin now felt dry since I didn't have expensive lotion to use. Molly glanced at me, noticing me staring. She gestured toward the bottles. "Go ahead, use the lotion."

I dumped my package onto the floor and poured some lotion onto my hands and the milky, thick mixture felt heavenly on my rough, dry skin. I sniffed, enjoying the wonderful rosy scent. Feeling luxurious, I dropped onto the bed, removed my scuffed, worn shoes, and enjoyed the silky lotion on my feet and I made sure to place some in between my toes. "Molly, this lotion is great."

The lotion reminded me of the lotion I used to use every day. I immediately recognized the brand name on the bottle. The lotion proved pricey, and my eyes misted. I blinked my tears away, not wanting Jack to see me cry. When we docked together, we wouldn't have much money. I closed my eyes, still enjoying the wonderful scent. Was I really ready to give up my luxurious lifestyle? Would I be forced to earn a living? If so, what could I do? The questions exploded in my brain like popping kernels of corn. I blinked, forcing myself to focus. I returned the bottle of lotion back to the dresser, forcing myself to speak. "Where did you get the lotion?"

"One of the passengers on board had an extra bottle, so, I purchased it from her. I promised to pay her for it after we docked, but, she insisted I keep it for free. She also gave me the cold cream and other stuff on the dresser."

Jack dropped onto the bed beside me, looking confused, and I figured he was wondering why I was so taken with the lotion. He finally spoke. "Well, Molly, you and Rose have had an entire conversation about lotion, but, for some reason, I doubt that's why you called us up to your room."

"Jack, you're right." She glanced at her watch, pulling a chair from her dresser and sitting in it. "We don't have a whole lot of time left before we start."

I threw my recently-lotioned hands up into the air. "Start what?" I asked.

Molly paused for a few seconds. "Well, I met this man while I was on board this ship."

I scoffed, wondering if Molly wanted to tell us about a recent passenger ship romance.

She grabbed my arm. "Don't scoff at me, Rose. I'm just tryin' to help you and Jack." She dropped my arm and smoothed the wrinkles on her dress. "Anyway, this man's a makeup artist and he has his kit with him."

I frowned. "A make-up artist?"

Molly nodded. "He's got makeup, wigs, costumes…everything. He has this huge trunk and he has all of his supplies in it."

Jack shook his head. "Molly, how's a makeup artist going to help Rose and me?"

Molly raised her eyebrows, staring at us. "You two can be so dense, maybe it's because you're so young." She patted my shoulder. "If Henri, the makeup artist, can make you two up to look different, then Cal and your mother won't know who you are when we dock." She then looked at Jack. "I know Cal's gonna try and have you arrested Jack. Trust me. I know his type. He's done enough damage to your relationship while you two were on the Titanic. He'll just try and do more damage once we dock."

A loud knock sounded on the door. Molly stood and traipsed to the door, grabbing the door knob. "Who is it?"

"It's Henri." The man spoke with a French accent.

Beaming, Molly pulled the door open, grabbing Henri by his arm. The makeup man was old, like around sixty. He sported a head full of gray hair and his mustache was bushy. He pulled a large, wooden, treasure-chest-type container into the room. He huffed as he pulled it and Jack immediately went to the man and assisted him in pulling the container into the room. Henri studied me and Jack, his lips pulling into a slow, lazy smile. "What a nice looking couple. Why you want me to cover these nice faces, Molly?"

Molly rolled her eyes. "Henri, I explained all of this to you yesterday." In an exasperated voice, Molly explained our predicament to Henri and he looked a little bit puzzled. I don't think he understood English very well.

Swallowing, closing my eyes, I recalled my years of French that I learned from my private tutor. In fluent French, I explained our predicament to Henri and his gray eyes snapped with anger. He understood what I was saying.

"C'est terrible!" said Henri in French.

I nodded, switching back to English. "Yes, it is terrible." I grabbed Jack's hand, gazing at Henri, glad that I knew that I could trust him. "J'aime Jacques."

Jack looked confused, looking from Henri, to me, to Molly. Molly just shrugged, responding to Jack's unasked question. "Don't look at me, kid. I don't speak any French."

I gazed deeply into Jack's eyes, explaining. "I just told him all that Cal and my mother have done to break us up." I paused, suddenly feeling shy. "I told him that I loved you."

"Ah, Rose." He hugged me and it felt so good. "You know I love you too," he whispered in my ear. "I love you so much." His mouth came closer to mine and I eagerly anticipated the kiss when Henri roughly pulled me away, shaking his head.

"No time for kissing," he said to me in French.

Molly must've figured out what Henri was saying because she made a similar statement. "You two lovebirds and kiss and cuddle later. Right now, Henri needs to disguise both of you before you get off this ship."

So, for the next two hours, Henri worked his magic. He pulled out a dark wig for me and before he put it on, he bundled my thick red hair into a tight knot. "Nobody will know you with this wig on." He then covered my face with thick, pancake-like makeup, giving me a few wrinkles. Once he was done, I glanced at myself in the mirror and gasped. I looked like an old, decrepit lady instead of a young debutante!

Henri pressed a pair of sunglasses into my hand. "Wear these so that nobody will see your pretty green eyes."

"I promise to wear the sunglasses when we leave the room," I said.

Next, Henri started on Jack. He went through the same routine, and instead of giving Jack a dark wig, he gave him a gray, short-haired wig. Jack was given a few wrinkles, too, and Henri gave Jack a pair of sunglasses too. Jack's mouth dropped open when he spotted his aged face in the looking-glass. "Rose, this is crazy."

Molly spoke. "I know it's crazy, but, it has to be done." A strong fog horn sounded, signaling that we'd be docking soon. "You two can wait here for a few minutes before we dock." She dumped her lotions and creams into a small sack, handing me the container. "Rose, you can have these." I clutched the sack, thankful to have the items. Molly pulled both me and Jack into a short, impulsive hug. "I'm still worried about you two. I'll be prayin' for ya." She left with Henri, leaving us alone in the room.

I placed my shades over my eyes and Jack did the same thing. We looked at each other. "Do you think that this will work?"

Jack nodded. "I'm sure it will."

"Jack, I'm scared."

"Yeah, me too."

Holding one another's hands, we left Molly's room and went to the deck of the ship. Tons of people populated the deck, eager to leave. Suitcases and purses littered the deck as people waited to dock. I gazed at the Statue Of Liberty in the distance.

"Where are they?" Cal's nerve-wracking voice grated against my eardrum. I tensed.

Cal and my mother stood right in front of Jack and me. My mother looked as if she'd aged ten years since the sinking of the Titanic. There were dark circles under her eyes and I figured both her and Cal had been searching for me for a long time. I glanced at Jack and he shook his head, signaling for me to be quiet.

"Cal, they have to be somewhere on this ship. We're about to dock." My mother gave a nervous laugh, covering her stupid mouth. "I'm sure we'll find them."

Cal narrowed his eyes, his lips pulling into a tense frown. He grabbed my mother's arm into a tight grip, and I had to force myself not to gasp. Cal spoke through clenched teeth, and I listened to every word he said. "Well, if we don't find her, then the wedding's off. If that slut has my necklace, I'm going to have both her and that annoying vagabond arrested for theft." He squeezed my mother's arm and she whimpered.

"Let me go." My mother spoke through clenched lips and Cal released her, his eyes snapping with anger. My mom pulled her arms together in front of her, her back hunched. Staring at her profile, I realized my mother sobbed. In my entire life, I'd never seen my mother shed a tear. I swallowed, tears gathering in my own eyes. However, I knew I couldn't sob, it would ruin Henri's perfect makeup job.

Cal glanced at the Statue of Liberty for a few seconds and it appeared his anger evaporated like steam disappearing over hot food. "I'm sorry." He patted my mother's shoulder. "Where are my manners?" He shook his head, staring into the distance, refusing to meet my mother's intense gaze. "I know it's not your fault that Rose is missing." His voice softened, and he continued to speak. "Look, you should've learned to control your daughter. When we dock, you'll be on your own. I'm afraid I can't do anything to help you without the promise of your daughter's marriage."

Tears continued to gush from my mother's eyes, and for the first time in my life, I felt sorry for my dumb mom. With her thin shoulders hunched, and her red hair blowing wild in the wind, my mother looked like a despicable caged animal that had been set free in the wild. She looked lost, unable to fend for herself in a thick, dangerous jungle. I also noted she wore no makeup. My mother never made an appearance in public without her makeup. I knew she'd lost everything on the sinking of the ship, but, figured she would've tried to borrow some makeup from another Carpathia passenger to make herself look presentable.

She rubbed her arm, and I figured Cal had given my mother a bruised arm, just as he'd given to me. She grabbed Cal's arm. "We'll find Rose when we dock. I promise. And I also promise that she'll marry you. She's just upset, grieving, because of the Titanic sinking. I'm sure she'll come to her senses soon." My mom looked away from Cal, but, I could tell that she was worried. The only thing my mom could do to support herself was to become a seamstress – if that happened to my mom, being forced to work and cater to the upper class, some of them her good friends, she'd be devastated, wounded.

I could imagine the whole ordeal would kill my mother, and that was an extremely sad, sobering thought.

Cal patted my mother's head, almost as if he were comforting a lost puppy. His lips tipped into a small smile. "You might be right. We might find them."

I swallowed, trying to keep control of my emotions as I watched this drama unfold in front of me. Jack and I clasped hands, united, worried about our future together. I knew we should leave, go to another part of the ship, but, I couldn't pull myself away from my mother and Cal. After all, I was seeing a side to my mother that I'd never witnessed before.

The fog horn blasted again. Jack tugged on my arm, trying to convince me to go to another part of the ship, but before we could leave, Cal and my mother looked directly us.

**Chapter 6**

Rose’s mother and Cal stared directly at them. Rose’s mother - Mrs. DeWitt Bukater – had her mouth dropped open, and Jack thought she was going to say something, but, she turned away and became engrossed in another conversation with Cal. Cal’s and Mrs. Bukater’s voices lowered, and Jack pulled Rose away, worried about how the conversation that they’d just overheard would affect her.

Pulling her away from the throngs of people, Jack found a stairway and walked down the steps, their footsteps pounding on the wooden stairs. “Jack, where are you taking me?” Rose whispered, clutching his hand. Her fingers slicked with sweat, and Jack figured Rose was probably mortified. The first door he spotted, he turned the knob. Relief flowed through his veins like warm honey when he discovered the door unlocked.

A male voice stopped them. “Hey!” Jack turned quickly, his dark glasses dropping further on this nose. He spotted Liam coming toward them, and he breathed with relief.

Rose spoke before Jack could say anything. “Liam!” From the relieved edge to her voice, Jack realized seeing Liam calmed Rose. He again wondered about the emotional bond that the older man shared with his future wife.

Liam stopped in front of them, hands on hips. “They’re docking. I don’t think they want anybody on board right now. Because of the excitement, they’re short of staff members and they paid me to make sure all the rooms are empty.”

“Liam, it’s me, Rose.”

Liam’s gray eyes widened and he stepped back, staring at us as if we were foreign creatures. “What in God’s name has happened to you, child?”

Jack pulled the door open, turned the light on, spotting a closet filled with white buckets, mops, brooms, and push carts. The cream colored walls housed shelves of white towels and linens. He pulled Rose into the closet, gesturing for Liam to follow. He then pulled the door closed and locked it. Jack removed his sunglass and Rose pulled her wig off. Jack warned her. “No! Don’t do that!”

Rose gasped. “Why? Nobody will see us in here.”

Rose knew absolutely nothing about survival. “We’re on a ship and I wouldn’t be surprised if somebody, like your mother or Cal, pays somebody to come on here looking for us, convinced that we’re still on board.” Frowning, Rose placed the wig back onto her head. I caressed her gray-haired wig, relieved that she did what I asked without complaining.

“What’re you two doing dressed like this?” asked Liam. They still had not answered his question, so, in a rushed voice, Jack explained that they were hiding from Rose’s mother and Cal.

Liam’s eyes snapped with anger and his large hands balled into tight fists. “Cal, is that the one who was messin’ with ya lass? The one who hit ya when you was in the infirmary?”

Rose nodded. “Liam, even though we have a disguise on, I’d feel better getting off this ship so that he can’t see me.”

Jack nodded, glad to hear that Rose was thinking clearly. “I figure the press will be around, asking questions and that Cal and Rose’s mom will stick around looking for us. They probably won’t recognize us when we exit the ship, though.” Jack then explained that Rose’s mother and Cal had just seen them and had not recognized them. “I pulled Rose away because she was upset.”

Liam shook his head, his strong features filled with sadness. “Did anybody tell you about the assistance?”

Rose’s lovely voice sounded in the locked closet. “What assistance?”

“There are some women’s aid societies who will help those women who lost their men in the sinking of the ship. They’ll give you a place to stay at a rooming house for a few months, until you can get on your feet and decide what you need to do for financial support. There was an announcement made after breakfast, but, I guess you two missed it.” He glanced at Jack, his face filled with sorrow and a bit of regret. “There’s not a lot of aid for the men survivors. They announced that they’ll buy you a ticket if you want to go to Philadelphia. You could take the train.”

“I can take care of myself. I’ve been on my own since my parents died when I was fifteen.” Jack looked into Rose’s beautiful eyes, stroking her wrinkled cheek. “Rose, this is what we need to do.”

Rose furrowed her brow, chewing on her lovely lower lip. Unable to resist, he crushed his mouth to hers, kissing her wildly, his blood burning with love for this wonderful, brave, beautiful woman. He didn’t even care that Liam was in the closet with them. He stopped kissing her, stroking her gray hair. “You need to accept the assistance offered to the women. I can take care of myself.”

Rose gasped. “But, I don’t want to leave you.” Her startled voice heightened and she shivered, tears pouring down her cheeks. “Jack, I don’t want to be alone.” She sniffed and he found a washcloth from a shelf, and taking great care, he pressed the material against her cheek, drying her wet eyes.

“It’ll only be for a little while.” He kissed her ear. “Rose, I’ll never leave you. Do you trust me?”

She blinked and their eyes locked like pieces to a jigsaw puzzle. With her long, pretty fingers, she touched his forehead, his cheek, and slowly, her fingers traced his nose and his lips. Her light, sensitive touch burned his gut, and his love for her unfurled and he gasped, touching her lips with his, taking her hand. In a soft, whispery voice, she responded. “I trust you.”

Liam interrupted our conversation. “You two stay in here. I’ll let you know once we dock and I’ll make sure you two get off the boat safely.” He paused, staring at them for a few seconds. “After I make my rounds and I’m sure the rest of the ship is empty, I’ll come back in here and make sure you two have docked before I go to the captain to let him know that I’m finished and that the ship is empty of passengers.”

Jack barely paid attention as Liam unlocked the door, closing it behind him. Jack clicked the lock, making sure nobody could enter the closet. Pulling Rose into his arms, he sunk onto the floor, holding her tightly. Stroking her cheek, he spoke. “Are you okay?”

She sniffed, fresh tears cascading down her cheeks. Continuing to take care of her, he mopped her damp cheeks with the washcloth, stroking her arms. “No, Jack, I feel terrible.” She shook her head, her frizzy, gray wig scratching Jack’s cheek. Taking a deep breath, she spoke again. “I can’t believe that Cal hit my mother like that. I’ve never seen my mother degraded, humiliated like that.” She turned around, staring into Jack’s eyes. “Seeing my mom like that made me feel scared, unsettled, terrified.” Whimpering, she fell into his arms. “Oh, Jack. My mother’s always calm, in control, showing no emotion. She doesn’t act happy, sad, or upset…she’s just this emotionless robot doing things to make sure we keep our money and our prestige.”

“Ah, Rose. Sweetheart, your mom’s only human. She’s wearing a mask.”

“What do you mean?” Rose’s lovely brows furrowed into a frown, and Jack pressed his lips to her temple before explaining. “Your mother is just acting emotionless. She feels something, but, she doesn’t want anybody to know what she’s feeling. That’s why seeing her being abused and helpless like that upsets you so much. When I say she’s wearing a mask, I didn’t mean it literally. She’s just putting on an act for everybody.”

Rose didn’t respond as she laid in his arms. He cradled her body, occasionally kissing her face. He sniffed, glorifying in the wonderful rose-scented water she’d used in her toilette. Her even breathing signaled that she may have fallen asleep. “Are you sleeping?” he whispered.

“No.”

He stared at the shelves of linens, bedding, and towels, recalling what he had to say. “Remember I’d wanted to talk to you about something this morning after breakfast, but, we got sidetracked?”

Rose nodded, the movement of her head sluggish. “Yes?”

“I’d wanted to try and figure out a plan for survival once we docked. But, speaking with Liam helped me to form a plan. The first part of my plan was to make sure you’re safe. That’ll be accomplished if Liam’s news is true about the rooming house. At least you’ll have someplace to stay once we get off the ship.”

“I still feel funny about leaving you.”

“Rose, don’t start. At least you’ll be taken care of.”

Shifting, Rose glanced at Jack, pressing her hands together. “I wonder what’ll happen to my mom? What’ll she do for survival since I’m not marrying Cal?”

“I’m sure she’ll find a way to make a living. She’ll probably find some of her rich friends to take her in until she gets her business established, I suppose.” He really didn’t know what else to say to comfort Rose. Although Rose and her mom didn’t get along, at least her mom was still alive. He often wondered what his life would’ve been like if his parents hadn’t died. Would he still have been a drifter artist, wandering around the world? “So, you’ve never had any good times with your mother, never?” Jack still found it hard to believe that a mother-daughter relationship could be so cold and unfeeling.

“My mother doesn’t know how to have a good time. Her nose is stuck so high in the air that she doesn’t know how to be a part of this earth with regular people, having a good time, she has to orchestrate and control everything.” She shivered and Jack tightened his hold on her body. “I can’t even eat what I want.”

Frowning, he toyed with her fingers, not understanding. “What do you mean?”

“When I’m with Cal, he orders my food. When I’m alone with my mom, she tells me what to eat.” Her voice lowered, and Jack strained to listen to her. “She said that I was too fat, and I needed to lose weight before the wedding. She said Cal would despise a fat bride.”

“What?” Jack’s voice echoed in the closet, and he lowered his tone, not wanting to bring attention to themselves to any wanderers still straggling around the ship. “Rose, you’re beautiful.” Thoughts of their sensuous evening filled his mind. Closing his eyes, he found the right words to speak. “You’re perfect just the way you are. You have a strong spirit, a perfect beautiful body and you’re courageous.” Shaking his head, Jack’s disgust with Rose’s mother and Cal increased. “Cal and your mom are breaking your spirit, making you miserable. You’re strong, and you don’t need them in your life.”

“My mom doesn’t understand about making others happy. She’s the only person that matters in her life. She thinks she knows what’s best. My mom is so miserable that she makes ME miserable. She can’t even sit down and enjoy a good meal because she’s afraid of getting fat.” She stopped speaking, grabbing Jack’s arm. “Jack, one of the most happiest, carefree times in my life was when you showed me how to fly.” Jack smiled, pleased she’d enjoyed the wonderful experience and he also recalled the long, passionate kiss they’d shared, standing on the front of the ship. “I also loved the party below deck. I loved hanging out with you and your friends….” Her voice faltered and Jack searched her face, wondering about her mood. “Now, most of your friends are dead..” her voice caught, and tears formed in his eyes, recalling the awful tragedy.

Jack blinked his tears away, missing the joy and camaraderie he’d shared with Fabritzio, his best friend. Sighing, he kissed her hair. “Rose, we can’t focus on the past. We have to think about now, about survival. Let’s try and make a new beginning for ourselves.”

Rose nodded. “Okay.”

A hard, insistent knock pounded on the door. Jack remained still, signaling Rose to remain silent. “Hey, it’s Liam.”

Rose jumped off of the floor, and Jack did the same. Blessed relief flowed from Rose’s sweet voice. “Oh, thank God.” She unlocked the door, allowing Liam into their hiding place.

“The crowds are gettin’ off of the ship. It’s best to leave with the crowd. You can blend in with them pretty well.”

Jack expressed his gratitude. “Thanks, Liam.” He shook the older man’s hand. “I appreciate your helping Rose while I was in the infirmary.”

“It’s me pleasure.” Liam released Jack’s hand before pulling Rose into a hug. “You take care of yerself, lass. I’d offer to help you meself, but, I don’t have much money. I’m plannin’ on startin’ a new life here in America.”

Liam released Rose, and Jack could see that she was still upset. He attempted to make her feel better. “Rose, remember what I said. Don’t focus on the past, but focus on the future. Be strong.”

Grabbing her hand, they followed Liam up the stairs to the deck above. A plank had been dropped, leading to the blessed land of New York. *Lord, help us.* Jack made sure they comingled with the rest of the crowd. Scanning the throngs of people, he spotted Cal and Rose’s mother in the distance. Confident that their disguises would hide them, he tried not to worry about Cal realizing who they were. Once they’d moved toward the plank, he pulled her aside. “Are you nervous?” She nodded, tears spilling down her wrinkled cheeks. Her dark sunglasses hid her bottle-green eyes, and right now, at this moment, she was the most beautiful, alluring old-looking lady he’d ever seen.

His blood warmed and his belly unfurled with desperate need. He pulled her into my arms and kissed her, whispering into her gray hair. “We’ll survive, don’t worry.” Jack pulled her closer while they walked down the wooden plank. He glanced at the Statue of Liberty greeting them from the New York harbor. She sniffed, shivering, clutching the brown package that the steward had given to her earlier. “Are you cold?”

She nodded. “A little.”

The sky darkened and soon, a few big drops of rain tumbled from the sky, landing on Rose’s face. He kissed her rain-splattered cheek, as they stepped onto the soil. “How do you feel?” He whispered in her ear. People scattered around them like snowflakes tumbling in the wind. Women cried, holding screaming children. Frightened couples stepped off the boat. Rose looked around, taking a long time to answer his question.

She sniffed. “I feel terrible.” She tensed, her mouth dropping open.

“Rose, what’s wrong?”

She gestured toward the edge of the crowd. Cal stood with her mother. Cal held Mrs. Bukater’s arm in a tight grip, and Rose’s mom looked frightened, her thin body shaking like a leaf. Two police officers stood with Cal, and Jack figured Rose and Molly were right - Cal was trying to find him to arrest him for the theft of that dumb necklace. Cal’s perfectly-arched eyebrows raised in suspicion while he scanned the crowd. Jack spotted a table for the Women’s Aid Society. Forcing Rose to follow him, he desperately wanted to get her away from this crowd before Cal figured out who they were. He whispered in her ear. “I think it’s best if you go to the Ladies Aid people alone, tell them you have nothing left and you lost your only source of income on the ship.” Jack glanced at Cal. “It won’t be a lie. See what they can offer to do for you.” He pointed to a nearby oak tree. “I’ll be waiting over there. Once you find out where you’re staying, come and let me know.”

Yelling and screaming Titanic survivors continued to exit the ship. Reporters stood at the side, their notebooks open, wanting to capture the latest hot story to put on the front page of their publication. A young boy, complete with knickers and a tweed cap, stood at the dock, waving a paper in the air. “Extra, extra! Titanic survivors arrive in New York today! Read the opinions of New York residents about the ship’s sinking! Extra! Extra!” Some of the people leaving the ship stopped to give the boy a coin before accepting the paper.

Rose stared at the crowd, and Jack recognized a number of people from first class. He recalled meeting them while eating dinner with Rose on the ship. “Honey, you’ve gotta be strong. Focus on the future, remember?” He stroked her cheek, hoping the fear would leave her face. Jack decided, then and there, that he’d make Rose smile sometime before the week was over.

“Okay, Jack.” She looked over at the Ladies’ Aid table. “I’ll go and talk to them to see what they say.”

Clutching her brown paper sack, she walked over to the table, speaking to the Ladies’ Aid. Jack stood, patiently waiting for her. The clean, vivid scent of a storm surrounded the crowd, a few scattered raindrops tumbled from the sky. Glancing at the people, Jack realized there were an over-abundance of women and children. Few men survived, and he wondered if people would look down on him, having a negative opinion of him, because he was a male survivor. Would people mistakenly assume he’d refused to give up his spot on a lifeboat for a woman or child? He doubted if people cared to hear how he’d almost died waiting in the cold, frigid water, using a piece of wood as a flotation device, never attempting to get on a life boat until one came back much later AFTER the sinking. A frazzled-looking woman walked past him, clutching a newborn infant. The baby screamed. Staring at the baby, he wondered how this woman, alone, would care for her child.

Taking a few deep breaths, he forced himself to calm down. Cal and the cops still stood in the distance, and Rose’s mother now walked through the crowd, looking like a lost, wounded ghost. Mrs. Bukater then returned to Cal, her hands lifted in defeat. A group of people walked in front of Cal and Rose’s mom, obstructing his faraway view. Breathing deeply, Jack looked up toward the sky. The leaves on the oak tree danced in the cold, early spring breeze. He closed his eyes, listening to the rustle of the branches in the wind. After several minutes, Rose returned to the oak tree. “They’re letting me stay in an all-female rooming house for free for a couple of months. They’ll be taking me there within the next hour.”

“Where’s the house?”

Rose told him the address, and Jack memorized it. “Jack, I didn’t mention my disguise, but, when I get to the rooming house, I’ll need to remove my makeup.”

“I know. It’ll be okay.” He paused. “I’m not sure when I’ll be able to come by to see you. I’ll try and come within the next day or so.” He continued scanning the crowd, wondering what he could do. “I don’t have my sketch pad or my pencils to do drawings, so, I need to figure out how I’ll be able to get my hands on some more drawing tools so that I can make some money from my art.”

Rose hesitated, and Jack could tell that she wanted to say something else. “What’s the matter?”

Sighing she explained. “They needed my name to place on the roster for the rooming house. Jack, I’m still scared that Cal might find me. I told them my name was Lily Jackson.” She turned away, as if embarrassed. Jack realized why she’d chosen the name Jackson.

“You wanted to use my name?” he asked, his voice filled with awe.

Rose nodded. “Jack, I owe you so much. If it wasn’t for you, I don’t know if I’d be alive today. I feel honored to use your name.” She rushed on, continuing to explain. “I didn’t want to use the name Rose, so, I chose Lily since it’s a flower, just like a rose is a flower.” Speechless, Jack didn’t know what to say about her using his name. A slight breeze blew, and Jack glanced at Rose’s pale forearms, noting the goosebumps on her skin. She clutched the brown-covered paper sack.

Feeling emotional, he changed the subject, not sure how to deal with his growing feelings for Rose. His love for Rose blossomed so fast, so quickly, that it was scary. In his entire life, he’d never felt so strongly for a woman. He gestured toward the package. “You never opened the package that the Carpathia crew woman gave you.”

Rose studied the package, almost as if she’d forgotten that she’d been carrying it around all day. Taking a deep breath, she ripped the paper off, revealing Cal’s overcoat. “I’m not sure if it’s safe for me to put on Cal’s overcoat.” She’d been wearing it when the Titanic was sinking. It was a miracle that the Carpathia crew had returned the item to her.

Jack stared at the coat before looking around at the throngs of sad and confused people scattered around the dock. Several people had coats on that resembled Cal’s. “Rose, you’re cold. Put the coat on. You’ll be okay.”

Rose’s teeth chattered and her skin became paler. Desperate to protect her, Jack pulled the coat from the wrapping. “Here, put this on. I can’t have you getting sick.” He stood behind her, the coat open wide. She placed her arms into the sleeves and then Jack buttoned up the coat. He then took one of her hands into his, the chill sending a shiver down his spine. “Rose, you’re freezing.”

“Jack, don’t talk so loud,” Rose whispered, lowering her voice. “I don’t want anybody to overhear us.”

Jack nodded, pleased that Rose reminded him to speak quietly. “We need to warm you up. Put your hands into the pockets.”

Rose bit her lower lip, and Jack wondered if she suffered from the shock of their ordeal, or, if she were coming down with something. She shoved her hands into the pockets, and a small gasp escaped from her lovely, ruby red lips. “Oh, my God! Lord, help me.” With a quick turn, she turned away from the loud noise of the crowd, facing the huge oak tree, gesturing for Jack to turn also. Pulling her hand from the pocket of the expensive, tattered coat, she removed The Heart Of The Ocean – the rare, priceless, blue diamond necklace which Cal had used to have Jack falsely arrested on the Titanic.

**Chapter 7**

The blue diamond sparkled, and a drop of rain splattered the surface of jewel. I wiped the moisture away and Jack grunted, covering the necklace with his hand. “Put that thing away.” His urgent tone caused a chill to snake up my spine. I slipped the necklace back into my pocket and remained facing the oak tree. Jack continued speaking as I tried to calm myself down. “I see a sign over there for those who want to go to Philadelphia.”

I gasped, staring at Jack. “But I thought you said you weren’t leaving.”

Jack grabbed my hand, smoothing his fingers over mine. “You know I’m not leaving. I can probably convince them to give me the money for the ticket.” He shrugged. “I need to start someplace. I wouldn’t use the money to buy a train ticket, but, if I had some paper and pencils and other art supplies then I could at least start making some money doing drawings.” He paused, kissing my cheek before he continued speaking. “I can’t risk trying to double the money on a card game. What if I lose?”

Taking a deep breath, I nodded, realizing that Jack was probably right. “Okay. Are you going over there right now?”

“Yes. Will you be okay here by yourself?”

“I guess so.” I sighed, licked my lips, saying the first concern that came to my mind. “That line over there is long for the train tickets. Once you get your money, they may have already taken me to the rooming house.”

“I know. I’ve memorized the address and I promise I’ll come by soon.”

“When?”

“I don’t know…soon.” He touched my cheek with his index finger, bringing his lips to mine. After our brief kiss, he spoke. “Remember, you have to trust me.”

I swallowed, recalling that I had to remain courageous in order to get through this situation. “I trust you,” I whispered back.

He released me, and we turned away from the tree. I watched him walk through the throngs of people toward the organization that was offering help in purchasing train tickets to Philadelphia. The rain continued to sprinkle and the leaves on the oak tree billowed in the cold breeze. I huddled beneath Cal’s tattered overcoat, still wondering about my fate.

My mind filled with memories over the last few days, Cal’s abuse, the wonderful time I’d spent with Jack, falling in love for the first time of my life. Then, memories of the ship sinking invaded my mind. I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to block out the images of those dying – men, women, children…

“Miss Jackson.” A female voice interrupted my thoughts, and I popped my eyes open. “I’m glad I found you. We’re about to cart everybody off to the rooming house.” Granting me a kind smile, she continued speaking. “You left after you signed up for the room. We’d wondered where you were.”

Taking a deep breath, I responded. “I just needed some time alone.” I shoved my hands into the pockets of Cal’s coat, rubbing my fingers over the necklace. “I’m ready to go if you are.”

The woman led me over to a gleaming Model T. Running my fingers over the exterior, I recalled how my mother was looking forward to purchasing one of these, as well as hiring a driver, after I’d married Cal. The woman cleared her throat, and I jumped, realizing that I was holding her up by looking at the car, reminiscing about my former life. There were two other women ensconced in the back seat. An older Black man sat at the wheel, his salt and pepper hair cut close to his head. His full lips tipped into a smile, and he nodded at me. I returned his grin. “Hi,” I muttered.

I climbed into the back seat with the other girls, sitting beside the window. As we pulled into the New York traffic, I scanned the scenery. I’d been to New York countless times, but the cars, traffic, and hustling people never ceased to amaze me. I attempted to lose myself in the madness of New York, desperate to forget my never-ending problems. The cold wind blew and I shivered, continuing to bury my hands into my pockets.

A voice interrupted my thoughts. “Hi, my name’s Miranda, and I’m your roommate.” I glanced at the girl beside me, stunned. In my entire life, I’d never shared a room with another person. I’d always had my own room with my own servants. I glanced at this girl. She looked around my age, but then I touched my face, recalling that I was disguised as an old woman. How would I explain my change in appearance once we’d reached the rooming house?

The car bumped along the road, and I winced, not wanting to engage in conversation. The woman who’d led me to the car spoke. “I’m the person who runs the rooming house. The aid society has given me enough money to see that you girls will have a nice place to live for a few months. My name is Mrs. Roker.”

The girl sitting beside me spoke again, her red-painted mouth turned into a frown. “How come you’re not talking old lady?” She glared at me and I winced, still wondering what I should say. Would it be appropriate for me to remove my wig now, revealing my true hair color? I glanced outside the window. The car had stopped and throngs of people crossed the street. Several men wore dark business suits and clutched newspapers in their arms.

“It takes me awhile to warm up to new people.” I swallowed, continuing to glance outside the window, noting the tall buildings lining the street. “My name is Ro—Lily. My name’s Lily.” How in the world was I going to remember that my name was Lily Jackson now?

Miranda’s eyes softened as soon as I spoke. “Oh. Ok. I don’t know how I’ll feel about sharing a room with an old lady. I ain’t used to staying with old people.” The distain in her voice caught me off-guard. What should I say? Unsure, I remained silent, figuring I’d discover what to tell Mrs. Roker and Miranda about my altered appearance later.

We continued down the street, the kind-looking Black man barely glancing in our direction. I noticed the other girl sitting on the other side of the back seat, next to Miranda. I was about to speak to her, but Miranda cut me off. “That’s Cecile. She doesn’t talk. At least, she doesn’t talk to me.”

I glanced at the backside of the other girl, assuming she was the same age as Miranda and I. She turned toward me, and I realized she was one of the prettiest girls I’d ever seen in my life. Her pale complexion was smooth but her pretty dark eyes were laced with sadness. Before I could speak, she abruptly turned toward the window, refusing to meet my gaze. I swallowed, upset about the slight. I was used to people granting me attention – being ignored proved a bad feeling. Grimacing, I wondered if Cecile gave me the cold shoulder because she thought I was an old woman. Were old people always so disrespected?

 Mrs. Roker spoke from the front seat. “Cecile will talk when she’s ready, Miranda. Don’t push her. She’s been through an awful ordeal.”

Miranda rolled her blue eyes, glaring at Mrs. Roker. Pursing her red-painted lips, she finally spoke. “Mrs. Roker, must I remind you that we’ve ALL been through a bad ordeal. The sinking of the Titanic was probably the worst thing that’s happened to all of us.” Lowering her eyelids, she gave Cecile an angry look, even though Cecile’s back was turned toward us. “However, going through a bad ordeal does NOT excuse someone from being rude.”

Mrs. Roker shook her head, staring out the window. We’d stopped again on the busy street at an intersection. The sounds of the city rattled my ears and all I wanted to do was arrive at the rooming house, remove my makeup, curl into bed and dream about Jack Dawson for the rest of the day and all night. Several buggies, carted by horses, passed in front of our intersection. There were also some wagons being pulled by large black stallions. I sniffed, recognizing the stench of horse dung. My stomach curdled, and when bile rose in my throat, I thought I’d vomit.

Miranda placed her hand on my arm, as if to comfort me. “You okay? You looked like you were turning blue.”

Waves of pain shot through my head and the Model T appeared to swoon. *Lord, help me.* Squeezing my eyes shut, the unusual, sickening feeling vanished. I opened my eyes, staring at Miranda. “I’m fine. Just a little shaken up. I haven’t been myself since the ship sank.”

Miranda nodded, her blue eyes full of sympathy. The driver then stopped in front of an appealing brownstone townhouse. The dark bricks appeared to be coated with years of soot. However, the darkness of the foundation gave the home character. Outside, a large pot held a plethora of springtime blooms. Seeing the vivid yellow flowers reminded me of my mom.

Growing up, my mother had always demanded that our gardener tend to our blossoms so that they bloomed into a rainbow of colors during the cool spring and the hot summer months. Our garden had been a favored treat for my mother because our flowers were the prettiest of all in our extravagant neighborhood. My mother hosted large garden and tea parties on warm days, inviting rich women wearing immaculate summer dresses in a rainbow of colors. Our cook would serve expensive, imported tea in a white floral china pot and serve her homemade pastries and thin-layered, buttery cookies. I’d sneak into the kitchen to steal some of those cookies since they were my favorite.

One time, my mom had caught me sneaking cookies and she’d slapped me so hard that my face hurt for an entire hour. I’d run to my dad, telling him what had happened and after the party, my dad and my mom had gotten into a heated argument over me.

I rested my head against the cool bricks of the building, tears gathering into my eyes. My dad wouldn’t have allowed my mom to force me to marry Cal. Although my dumb mom hated me, I knew that my dad had loved me. I wish he were still alive today. I’m sure my life would’ve been different if he had lived.

I jumped when Miranda placed her hand on my shoulder. “You okay? You’ve been standing there crying and staring at those flowers for two minutes.” I looked behind me and noticed Mrs. Roker and the other girl, Cecile, waiting to come inside. I was holding everybody up by daydreaming about my life as a child. So much had happened to me over the last few days that I’d turned insightful and melancholy.

I sniffed, pulling a handkerchief from my pocket, blowing my nose. “I’m sorry. I’m just emotional.” I said in a low voice.

Mrs. Roker spoke. “We understand, Lily. Go ahead and open the door. My maid has prepared a nice meal for you women. After you eat, I’ll show you to your rooms.”

Mrs. Roker’s comment made me think about something. “How many women do you have staying in your rooming house?”

“I’m just hosting the three of you for now.” She gestured toward the door. “Go on in, Lily. The door is unlocked.”

I was about to ask why she was calling me Lily, when I again recalled that Lily was supposed to be my name. Placing my hand on the brass doorknob, I turned it, opening the door to my new home. Stepping inside, I glanced around the living room. The pine walls displayed paintings of fruit. One painting contained a slew of apples tumbling from a white wicker basket. The furniture wasn’t nearly as nice as I was used to, but, it didn’t look bad.

I sniffed, my mouth suddenly watering. The scent of cooked meat and vegetables filled the room and in spite of my anger and sadness, I found that I was now hungry and wanted something to eat. The other girls stepped into the room and glanced around. Miranda spoke. “Something smells good.”

I nodded, not speaking, still digesting my surroundings. A tall, thin black woman stepped into the room. Her dark eyes twinkled with kindness. “Ya’ll can come into the kitchen to eat now if it’s okay with Mrs. Roker.”

Mrs. Roker eyed her cook. “Thank you, Geri. You all can set your things in the living room and come into the kitchen to eat.”

We did as we were told, and before we sat at the table, each of us washed our hands at the sink. My stomach rumbled, and I was glad that nobody noticed the sound except for me. It was kind of embarrassing to be so hungry that my stomach made such a noise! After our hand-washing, we made ourselves comfortable on the wooden chairs lining the long kitchen table. A cream-colored ceramic pot of beef stew nested on the table. The vegetables and meat swam in a thick, gravy-like sauce. My mouth watered again and I wondered if we’d start eating right away, or, if Mrs. Roker wanted to bless the food first.

Again, memories of my dumb mother filled my cluttered mind. My mom said she had no time in her life for Jesus since he didn’t exist, so, she never blessed the food. The only reason we were members of a church was because my mother said it ‘looked right’ for us to be members of a church. My dad never said much about church attendance. As I stared at the mouth-watering food, I again wondered about my own thoughts about God. I knew He existed, in spite of my mother’s mean words against our creator.

Geri came to the table with a platter of steaming bread and then she returned with a crock of butter nestled in a black container. I closed my eyes briefly, feeling light-headed. Miranda touched my arm. “Are you okay?”

I nodded, still coming to terms with all that had happened to me. I wondered about my mom. Where was she? Was she placed in a rooming house like me, or, had she been too proud to accept the free assistance, and, instead she shacked up with one of her rich, fancy friends?

Mrs. Roker clapped her hands. “We’re going to bless the food now. As a rule in this rooming house, we always say grace before a meal. Understood?” She stopped and stared at each one of us, as if awaiting the response from all of her new boarders.

“Yes,” we all murmured, including Cecile.

Mrs. Roker bowed her head, and I followed her example. Soon, her strong clear voice filled the kitchen. “Lord, thank you for this wonderful day, and thank you for this food! Please let it nourish our bodies! And, Lord, please help these dear, wonderful women who will be living under my roof! Help them to be strong and help them to prepare for their futures! Amen!”

A spark of warmth shot up my spine, and my eyes popped open. Shaking the unusual feeling away, I murmured, “Amen.” Relief flowed through me. For some reason, I was glad that Mrs. Roker prayed, glad that she felt comfortable asking the Lord for guidance.

I was about to ladle some stew into my thick white ceramic bowl, but, Geri came to the table and started serving the stew. I shoved some stew into my mouth, forgetting the table manners that I’d been taught since birth. The stew proved exquisite. Herbs, spices, salt and tender meat danced on my tongue, making me aware of the fact that I enjoyed food! I finished off my bowl in minutes and scanned the table, noting that Cecile glared at me. She’d barely touched her stew, and I realized her pale arms were as skinny as sticks. Her holier-than-thou attitude reminded me of my mother, and I knew that I wasn’t going to be getting along with Cecile. I stuck my tongue out at her, not caring how juvenile I acted. The stew was so good that I told Geri to dish me up another bowl. Cecile jerked her head back, and her mouth dropped open. However, I didn’t care about being rude to her. I also didn’t care for her lousy, uptight attitude.

Ignoring Cecile’s glacial stare, I then took a thick crusty slice of hot bread and dipped it into my stew gravy. The light fluffy bread mingled nicely with the meat and vegetables. Heaven, that’s what this reminded me of, a slice heaven. Closing my eyes, I enjoyed this exquisite meal without having my mother hovering nearby, reprimanding me for my appetite. If my mom were here, she probably would’ve only eaten a few bites of the stew and toyed with her bread. My mother didn’t know how to enjoy herself and that was one reason why she was so sour. The only thing she enjoyed was money, and seeing other people fawn over her because of her prestige.

Once we were done with our stew, another surprise appeared. Geri stepped into the room, carrying a huge chocolate layer cake! Chocolate cake! I hadn’t had a piece of chocolate cake in ten years! My mouth watered again, and Geri seemed to sense my elation as she cut me a huge slice. I tasted the wonderful sweet chocolate concoction, savoring the moist cake and creamy fudge frosting. After eating my food, fatigue swept into my bones like a tidal wave. I yawned, covering my mouth. “I’m so tired.”

Miranda stood. “Me too.”

Mrs. Roker shooed us toward the living room. We got our things and then she pointed to the stairs. “Go on up, I’ll show you your rooms.”

I trudged up the stairs, carrying my few belongings. Mrs. Roker opened the first door at the top of the steps. “This room belongs to you and Miranda.”

She opened the door and I gazed inside my new home. The walls were painted a cheerful color of robin-egg blue. Two beds stood beside the open window. Weak sunlight streamed into the space and a single washstand stood between the beds. A dresser and a closet were situated on the right side of the room and I immediately noticed my sparse furnishings.

However, the feeling of my freedom made me forget the sparse furnishings in my room. It’d be great to just sit around a bit, be me, without being hounded day and night by my mom and Cal. I walked over to one of the beds, dumping my belongings onto it. “I’m going to bed soon.”

Mrs. Roker spoke. “The privy is down the hall. I’m afraid you girls will have to share.”

I shrugged, my mind still spinning. “That’s fine.”

After Mrs. Roker and Cecile left, Miranda dumped her belongings onto the other bed. “I’m going to the privy.”

“Okay.” Once she’d left, I glanced at my image in the mirror. I gasped. I looked horrible! I removed my wig and poured water into the wash bowl. Several minutes later, I’d removed the makeup from my face, and I breathed a sigh of relief, pleased that I now looked like myself.

Miranda returned from the privy, not looking at me. She went over to her bed and opened her valise. “I wonder why Cecile gets her own room? I can’t stand that girl. What’s she---“ Miranda looked up at me, no longer able to speak. Her earth-shattering scream echoed throughout the entire house.

**Chapter 8**

“Miranda!” I covered my ears, glaring at my new roommate. “Don’t scream.” Removing my hands from my ears, I stared into Miranda’s eyes. “I’m Ro--..I mean, I’m Lily. I had makeup on to make myself look like an old lady.”

Narrowing her eyes into slits, she plopped onto her bed, her face full of confusion. I didn’t blame her for wondering about my actions. I know if the situation were reversed, I’d wonder why my new roommate had to dress like an old lady. “Why did you do that?” Her eyes widened and her mouth suddenly dropped open, as if she’d discovered something. “Are you in trouble with the law?”

I thought about the necklace that was still ensconced in the pocket of Cal’s coat. I hadn’t stolen it, but, I would think that if Miranda found it, she’d think that I was a thief. I immediately knew I had to put her mind at ease, so that she’d know that I was an honest person. I needed to tell her the truth. “My mom was trying to force me to marry a man.”

Intrigued, she gazed at me. “Is he handsome?”

I thought about Cal’s features. “I suppose some would think him handsome.” But to me, he was ugly, ugly as sin because his soul was so tortured. Swallowing, I fingered a tendril of my red hair, plopping onto the bed beside Miranda. “He was abusive to me.” I pulled up my sleeve, showing her the bruise on my arm.

She gasped. “How on earth did you get that bruise?”

“I got this bruise from the man I’m supposed to marry.” I shook my head. “I can’t marry him, Miranda.” I lowered my voice, leaning toward her. “I was afraid he might kill me,” I whispered.

She gasped. “Is that why you were disguised as an old lady?”

I nodded. I toyed with telling her about Jack. I decided honesty was the best policy at the moment. “I’m in love with somebody else, but, my mom won’t let me marry the man that I love. So, we had to sneak off the Carpathia wearing costumes, dressed like an old couple.”

She shrugged. “Where’s your man, the one that you love?”

“He says he has to make a living before we can try to make a life together. He’s a drifter, and he’s not used to staying in one place with a wife. But I know he’s willing to make the effort.”

Miranda’s deep chuckle soon filled the room, and her blue eyes sparkled with mirth. “Lily, you are so naïve! This man you’re in love with? You’ll probably never see him again. He doesn’t want to be shackled with a wife. He’s just telling you that he’ll come back because he doesn’t want to hurt your feelings!”

My heart skipped, and a vision of Jack’s handsome face filled my mind, making me remember my promise to trust him. He saved my life, literally. I knew he’d be back to get me. “Just shut up.” I turned away, not wanting to hear Miranda’s spiteful words. I knew it was childish for me to speak that way to her, but, I’d been so upset and emotional lately that I wasn’t acting like myself.

Softening her voice, she placed her hand on my shoulder. “Hey, don’t get mad at me. I’m just sayin’ that I know how men are.” She then looked me up and down, as if sizing me up or something. “Have you ever been with a man before?”

Unsure if I could trust her, I nodded, knowing she was asking if I’d ever been intimate with a male. “Miranda, he wouldn’t lie to me. If he says he’ll be back then he’ll come back.”

She sighed, shaking her head. “Well, you can believe that if you want to, but, I’m just sayin’ be careful. You need to focus on your own needs before worrying about him comin’ to take care of you. If he never shows up, then you need to have a plan as to how you’re going to take care of yourself.”

I turned away from her, anger simmering in my soul as hot as boiling pea soup. I refused to look at Miranda as she got ready for bed. Minutes later, she slipped beneath the covers and soon her deep, even breathing filled our small space, signaling that she’d fallen asleep.

Feeling uneasy, I slid off the bed, pacing around the room, sighing. After awhile, I trudged to the privy down the hall. After I was done, I exited the privy, tears pouring down my cheeks. I spotted Cecile standing in the hallway, staring at me. She opened her mouth, and then I realized she didn’t know who I was. “I’m Ro—Lily. I had on a costume earlier, dressed as an old woman, because I was hiding from somebody abusive.” The last thing I needed was for Cecile to do something stupid, like call the police or something. I also didn’t want her to scream. I’d heard enough screaming for the evening.

She remained silent, staring at me. Her stare unnerved me and I looked her up and down, just as Miranda had done with me earlier. Cecile wore a night dress and her pale, thin arms were folded tightly in front of her. I boldly looked into her pretty eyes, telling her the truth about herself. “You’re too uptight and skinny. You need to eat more food and learn to enjoy yourself before you turn into a miserable old lady like my mom.”

Her mouth dropped open. “Well!” She stomped to the privy, slamming the door behind her. I chuckled while walking to my room, glad that I was bold enough to tell Cecile the truth about herself.

After changing into my nightdress, I opened my satchel and pulled out the lotion that Molly Brown had given to me. Pouring a generous amount into my palm, I smoothed the luxurious lotion over my dry skin. The deep rose scent filled the room, filling my soul with a small slice of joy. Finally, I was done using the lotion.

I closed the bottle with the small, silver-colored lid before slipping under the covers, and closing my eyes. I daydreamed about kissing Jack on the Titanic. After pulling me into his arms, our lips touched, enjoying the sweetness from one another’s mouth. Thoughts of the kiss made me ache, deep within the core of my being. Suddenly, tears rushed into my eyes when Miranda’s angry words slammed into my brain with the speed of a freight train. My eyes popped open, and I sat up in my bed, staring out the window. We’d gone to bed early, so, it was still light outside. Fear, anger, and sadness rushed through me and my soft cries echoed in the little room. What if Miranda was right? What if Jack had really abandoned me?

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Jack held out his hand and the old, bearded person for the aid society pressed the bills into his palm. There was no way he’d be buying a ticket to Philadelphia – he needed to use this money to purchase art supplies. “Thanks,” he muttered, anxious to get away. Rushing from the crowd, he stepped from the docks and onto the streets of New York.

Horse-drawn carts plodded down the street, while cars streamed by. He stopped, focusing on the crowds of people. Everybody from young, well-dressed children to old, homeless people thronged the streets of New York. He strolled down the sidewalk, catching snippets of conversation.

“I still can’t believe the Titanic sank. Those poor people…”

“All that death, what will the survivors do without their loved ones?”

Hearing the chatter cluttered his mind, and to make himself feel sane, he thought about Rose. God, he loved that woman! Taking a deep breath, he stopped walking, leaning against a building, taking a deep breath. Desire coursed through his veins and he longed to kiss her red, full lips. *Lord, how will I ever be able to take care of her?*

Shaking thoughts of Rose away, he forced himself to focus. Taking a deep breath, he began walking again, thinking. He soon found that by walking fast, it helped him to forget his problems. He needed to find an art store, fast. Forcing himself to pay attention, he eyed the shops and stores that he passed. After walking for an hour, he spotted an art store. The professionally hand-painted sign simply read, ART STORE, in bold black letters against a cream-colored background.

His heart thumped with joy and he grinned, pushing the door open. A bell tinkled, signaling his arrival. He glanced around the dim store. The unique strong scent of artist paints filled the air, making him feel joyous. Feeling in his element, he strolled the aisles, spotting vibrant pallets of colorful paints and rows of artist pencils and sharpeners. His footsteps echoed on the slatted floor, and he wondered when someone would offer to help him. After browsing for a few minutes, a worker approached. “May I help you?” He appeared to be Jack’s age, but, then Jack remembered that he was dressed as an old man. The young worker towered over Jack and appeared extremely thin. His lips were pressed into a hard line and Jack wondered why he appeared angry. Looking down at his long fingers, Jack noticed that the man’s nails were smudged with paint.

“I hope you can help me.” Jack pointed to the pencils rolled in a canvas. The set was similar to the pencils he’d lost on the Titanic. “I was wondering how much that cost?”

The young man pursed his lips, pushing his bangs off his forehead, leaving a trail of bright red paint on his pale skin. Eyeing Jack for a few minutes, he then named the price for the set.

Flabbergasted, Jack remained silent. That price would take all of the money he’d gotten for his ticket to Philadelphia! “Are there any other art stores in the area?”

The man nodded. “There’s one more, but, I doubt you’ll get a better price over there.”

Gritting his teeth, Jack stomped out of the shop, his good mood evaporating. There had to be some way to get a set of art pencils for a cheaper price. But, he had no idea what to do. After he’d walked through the streets for an hour, he spotted a crowd of people. He stopped amidst the group, turning to the woman at his side. “What’s everybody standing here for?”

The well-dressed woman looked at his tattered clothing with contempt, and Jack wondered if she was appalled that an old, poor man would speak to her. “There’s an artist up there, doing sketches.” She continued to glare at him. “I doubt you could afford to pay his fees.”

Jack turned away from the rude woman, determined to speak to the artist. With his limited funds, he again wondered where he would be able to purchase some good quality art supplies for his drawings. He stepped aside, patiently waiting for the crowd to die down.

His stomach rumbled. He’d not had a meal since that morning. Again, he thought about the precious money lining his pocket. Not wanting to spend money on food at the moment, he decided to continue to wait to speak to the artist. Once he’d garnered his art supplies and made some money from drawings, he’d then worry about getting food into his belly. He forced the thoughts of food from his mind, determined to put his plan into action to make a living.

A woman stepped into the line behind him, and he glanced at her, picking up on the scent of cheap perfume and sausage. She bit into a sausage, her tight dress clinging to her thin body. He turned away from her, his stomach again grumbling.

“Hey old man,” she said. “Ya want some of my sausage?” She held the meat toward him and Jack’s mouth watered. However, for some weird reason, he couldn’t convince himself to eat after the woman.

Patting his stomach, he shook his head. “No thanks.”

Time went by as slow as a snail’s pace. The woman finished her sausage, licking her fingers. The sights and smells of New York cluttered his mind. Growing impatient, Jack stepped out of the line. This artist sure was slow! The line had barely moved and he’d been standing in it for an hour. He moved to the front of the line and patiently waited for the artist to finish the sketch he’d been working on. A child sat in front of the young artist. The artist looked about Jack’s age, and he wondered how long the man had been doing sketches. His dark brown hair hung loose down his neck as he drew the child with slow, deliberate strokes.

Jack gazed at the drawing, noting the young artist’s technique. Although the man’s work proved good, Jack felt his work was much better, plus, Jack knew his method of drawing proved much swifter and cleaner than this artist’s work. Once the artist was finished with the portrait, he presented it to the girl and her mother. The well-dressed mother dropped a coin into the artist’s outstretched hand. Jack approached the young man, holding his hand out. “Jack Dawson.” The artist glared at Jack as if he were a viper before he finally shook his hand with a limp grip, not bothering to tell Jack his name. “Look, I need to buy some art supplies. Do you know where I can get some good quality art supplies for a cheap price? I need a sketch pencil set.” He pointed to the man’s supplies. “Kinda like the one you’re using.”

As the next person stepped forward, the artist sharpened his pencils for a new sketch. His voice came out haughty and rough while he relayed some information to Jack. “There’s a pawn broker down in the neighborhood where the Blacks live. A friend of mine just pawned his sketch pencils last week because he had to pay bills from his gambling problem.”

Jack’s ears perked up at this news. He stood a bit taller, sensing that his career was about to get a fresh start in the land of New York. “Where’s this pawn broker located?”

The young man grunted, continuing to ready his pencils with the sharp knife. After reciting the address, he gave Jack some more information. “You need to remember that the art supplies may have already been purchased by somebody else.” Jack rolled his eyes, already knowing how pawn brokers worked. If he had to, he’d need to find supplies elsewhere if these were already taken. “Also, you need to remember this is a rough neighborhood.” The rude young artist glared at Jack, brushing his brown hair away from his thin, angular face. “An old man like you would be an easy target in that rough neighborhood.” He began the next drawing, running his pencil over the crisp white paper. “If you go inquiring about these art supplies, I’d be careful if I were you.” He glanced toward the sky for a few seconds. “It’ll be dark within an hour. If I were you, I’d go tomorrow.”

Dismissing the young man’s advice, Jack sprinted away, determined to get the art supplies. Used to living on his own, he figured he wouldn’t encounter anything that he couldn’t handle. An hour later, he traipsed into the neighborhood. The nasty scents of urine, dung, and trash permeated the air, and Jack winced, dismayed at the squalor. Several dark faces peered at him from shanty-like houses, but he trudged along, forcing his tired feet to go forward. He had to get these high-quality art supplies for this low price. If he were to get these supplies, he’d be taking the first step into the realm of making a living for both himself and Rose.

Longing for Rose drifted through him. He’d have to visit her soon, before she started to worry. His stomach again churned with hunger and his head drifted with dizziness. Perhaps he should’ve taken the woman up on her offer of a bite of sausage. Maybe he should’ve spent some of his precious dollars on food so that he wouldn’t feel so lightheaded. His step faltered and he almost tripped. Licking his dry lips, he realized he needed water, too. When was the last time he’d had something to drink?

He stopped walking, leaning against a church. The battered-looking building contained busted windows and the wooden door had been scraped with abuse. Taking a deep breath, he fought to regain his balance, thinking he should’ve listened to the rude young artist after all.

An angry voice drifted from the semi-darkness. “Hey, old white man. You in the wrong place.”

Before he could gather his bearings, a fist slammed into Jack’s cheek. Hot, liquid pain splattered his face and he groaned. Balling his fingers into a fist, he swung, cracking his attacker in the mouth. The man cursed and soon, several dark-faced men appeared. A fist pummeled into Jack’s belly and he screamed while men held his arms and legs, not allowing him to fight back. One dark-faced young man removed a knife and sliced the blade down Jack’s cheek. The pain shot through his entire body and Jack screamed before his world faded to black.

**Chapter 9**

Jack shivered, moaning. Tensing, his body wracked with shards of pain, shooting from the tip of his toes, all the way to the top of his head. Liquid, burning heat streamed through his blood. He struggled to sit up. The cool wind blew against his heated skin and he swallowed, again reminded of his extreme thirst from the previous day. He tried to move his leg, and white hot pain shot through his limb like a cannon. Screaming, he tensed.

“Lawd, have mercy.” The loud female voice surrounded him. Jack groaned again, praying his pain would go away. “Pastor, what we gonna do? Look at this white man layin’ in front of our church all beat up.” Jack struggled to open his eyes, but, his lids were like heavy pieces of timber.

“Thelma, calm down.” A male voice had responded, so Jack assumed the man was the pastor. “We need to help him.” His smooth deep voice didn’t have the same dialect as the woman. “It’s what the Lord would want us to do.”

“Huh? I ain’t gettin’ in trouble for helpin’ some white man. What if they say we beat him up? What if he calls the police and has us arrested?”

“Thelma, stop it!” Exasperation filled the man’s tone. Jack moaned again. “We need to help this old man. Can you stand up, old man?” Jack swallowed, pain sabotaging his body. He tried to stand and vivid torture shot up his leg. He screamed, before passing out again.

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Moaning, Jack wiggled his sore toes, realizing he lay on a small cot. Swallowing, he again realized his thick tongue burned with thirst. “Water.” His voice grated as if his throat had been rubbed with sand paper. His eyes reminded him of heavy bricks. Attempting to blink, he realized his eyes had swollen shut. Opening his eyes proved too painful, so he kept them closed.

“Thelma, get the young man some water.” The pastor’s clipped tone resonated in the room, and Jack wondered where he was. Were they inside the church? Strong arms supported his head, forcing his neck up while a cold tin cup pressed against his parched lips. He sipped, the cold liquid slid into his mouth and down his dry throat. Eager, he drank quickly, before the pastor spoke. “Don’t drink too fast, take your time.” Once he’d finished the water, his head dropped back onto the soft, bulky pillow. Fatigue weighed him down and he relaxed back on the small bed, falling asleep.

Later, whispers filled the room. He recognized the voice of the woman named Thelma. “Why was that white boy dressed like an old man?”

The pastor responded. “I don’t know. We’ll find out once he wakes up.”

“Pastor, I still don’t know if we’ve done the right thing. What if somebody’s lookin’ for him?”

“If somebody is looking for him then we’ll let them know he’s okay.” The pastor lowered his voice. “Thelma, you’ve got to trust me about this. What if you were lying in a gutter, cut with a knife, beaten to a pulp? If somebody did that to you, wouldn’t you want somebody to help you? We’re being good Samaritans, here. The Lord wants us to take care of this young man, and that’s what we’re going to do.”

“Well…okay. I guess I shouldn’t have said all that stuff. I’m just scared about what might happen.”

“Don’t be scared. Let’s pray.”

Jack fell asleep again, his mind drifting. *Again, he was aboard the Titanic. On the deck, he cradled Rose in his arms. While staring at the deep sea of water, mesmerized, he tilted her head, inviting her to share a mesmerizing kiss. Their lips locked, and he tasted the sweet nectar of her tongue, holding her tighter, loving her. His blood burning with passion, he ended the kiss, staring into the most exquisite green eyes he’d ever seen in his life.*

*Cal appeared, pushing Jack away, laughing. Cal slapped Rose, marring her snow-white skin. Jack screamed. “Stop!” He tried to stop Cal, but, a glass wall appeared, separating him from Cal and Rose. Pounding on the glass, he tried to shatter it, desperate to save Rose. “Rose!” Cal slapped Rose again, ripping the clothes from her perfect, beautiful body. Screaming, Rose scratched Cal’s face with her sharp nails, before spitting in his face. Cal balled his hand into a fist, about to punch Rose in her cheek. Jack opened his mouth, screaming at the top of his lungs, “Stop, Cal!” He fisted the glass wall again, and it shattered into tiny pieces. Rushing toward Rose and Cal, the glass crunched beneath his battered shoes. He’d almost reached them, when their images disappeared. “Rose!”*

The scent of chicken filled the room, and Jack groaned. The familiar voice of the pastor interrupted his dream. “Doctor, does he still have a fever? What’s wrong with him?”

An unfamiliar male voice responded. “The fever’s broken. That’s why he’s sweating right now.” Jack soon realized drops of moisture dripped down his face.

The pastor spoke again. “Doctor, you think we need to give him some of this warm chicken broth?”

“Yes, he needs to eat so that he can heal.”

The woman named Thelma spoke. “I’ll give it to him.” Her voice softened. “Young man, Pastor is going to help you hold your head up so that you can sip this chicken broth I made.” The pastor assisted Jack, holding his head up with his strong, capable arms. Thelma held a spoon to Jack’s lips, and he sipped the warm chicken-flavored broth. Once he’d eaten several spoons of broth, he dropped back onto the pillow, realizing his bladder was full.

Fisting the thin blanket in his hands, he struggled to sit up. “I’ve got to go.”

A strong hand grabbed Jack’s elbow. “Son, you need to rest.” Jack recognized the voice of the pastor.

He shook his head, but, doing so, made his brain feel like it would explode. “No. I have to go to the privy.”

“Ahh.” The pastor continued to hold Jack’s elbow. “Sit up really slow. The bathroom’s not too far away.”

“My eyes still won’t open.”

He recognized the doctor’s voice. “Young man, I’m the doctor. I’ve left a poultice to rub around your eyes to help the swelling.” He paused. “You’re still pretty drugged, so it’ll be impossible for you to walk. The pastor and I will carry you to the privy.”

Humiliation swept through Jack’s soul as the pastor and the doctor carried him down a hallway. Jack realized their steps echoed. A few minutes later, after he’d gone to the privy, they laid him back on the bed. The doctor spoke. “I’m leaving now, but I’ll be back to check on you later.” Fatigue swept through him and he laid back onto the pillow, falling asleep.

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Sunlight, warm and inviting, shined on Jack’s face. Grunting, he squeezed his fingers, shrugged his shoulders, realizing the pain in his body had lessened. Trying to open his eyes, he found the task impossible. A sticky substance coated his eyelids. Taking his index finger, he tried to wipe the stuff away from his eyes. “Somebody, help me.”

Thelma’s excited voice filled the room. “Pastor, he’s awake.”

The pastor responded, his deep voice bouncing off the walls. “Good. Thelma, use the stuff the doctor left to clean the poultice from his eyes.” The pastor then addressed Jack. “Hold on, Son. We’re trying to help you.”

A strong, medicinal scent filled the air while Thelma wiped his lids with a moist towel. He assumed the towel had been dipped into some kind of liquid. Thelma’s long, soft fingers tenderly cleaned his eyes, making Jack wonder if she were a nurse. Once she’d finished her ministrations, she spoke. “Okay, open your eyes.”

 Jack slowly opened his eyes, realizing he still couldn’t open them all the way. Right now, his eyes were only half open and he stared into two chocolate brown faces. The woman named Thelma had smooth skin, the color of rich cocoa. The pastor appeared several years older than Thelma. A bit of gray sprinkled in his dark hair, and Jack realized if his father had lived, he’d probably be around the same age as the pastor. He blinked several times, regarding the little table in the corner, as well as the small china pitcher and the bowl resting on the table. A desk nested in the corner, covered with papers and pens. He noted a small closet at the side of the room. “Where am I?”

 “You’re at my church. This is my office, and sometimes I spend the night here in this room when I’m working late on a sermon. I’m Pastor Michael Brown, and this is my stepdaughter, Thelma. Thelma serves as the church nurse and my secretary.”

 “Thank you for helping me.”

 Thelma pulled up a chair, close to his bed, and the pastor pulled his chair closer, too. As Thelma leaned toward him, he noticed the slight scent of floral perfume. “You’re welcome. Do you remember who beat you up?”

 He shook his head. “No.” He paused. “I mean, I don’t know their names or anything.”

 “Can you tell us what happened, Son, and what’s your name?”

 “My name is Jack Dawson.” Taking a deep breath, he told them the first thing that came to his mind. “I’m a Titanic survivor.”

Thelma gasped, her pretty brown eyes widening. “My lawd! You were on the Titanic when it sank?”

Jack nodded, recalling that the male survivors appeared not to get much sympathy. He rushed to explain that the lifeboat had returned while he’d been half-frozen in the water. “I stayed in the infirmary for most of my trip back on the Carpathia. Rose took care of me.” Struggling to recall the last few days, he relayed the events that had transpired since he’d arrived in New York, explaining why he’d been dressed as an old man. He also told of Cal and Rose’s mother. “So, you see, I have to find Rose.” He looked at the pastor, silently pleading with him. “I need to go to her rooming house.”

 Thelma asked a question. “Where’s her rooming house?”

 Jack blinked, struggling to remember. “I’m not sure.” He paused, shaking his head, the movement causing him pain. He winced. “There’s something important…I’m forgetting something.”

 Thelma patted Jack’s arm, trying to comfort him. “The doctor said you might have some memory loss because you were hit in the head by those thugs.”

He recalled his disturbing dream, breathing deeply. “I have to find Rose. Cal might hurt her.”

 Michael gave his opinion. “Jack, I’ll try and help you find Rose, but, you have to remember, there are a lot of rooming houses in this area.”

 Jack gritted his teeth, angry. “You don’t understand. She trusted me, and I’ve let her down. I can’t hurt her like that. I have to go visit her. I love that woman, and I have to protect her.” Exasperated, he rubbed his cheek, realizing he sported a bandage. “What happened to my cheek?”

Michael spoke in a low voice. “You don’t remember what those hooligans did to you? They cut your face with a knife. The doctor stitched you up. He said that you shouldn’t have a very bad scar.” He paused running his hand over his closely-cropped hair. “You know, the Lord was looking out for you, Jack.”

Sighing, Jack turned away from them, staring at the cream-colored wall. How was the Lord looking out for him? “My money’s gone, isn’t it?” He gritted the words out, angered that he now had to find a way to get some money to purchase his art supplies. How would he take care of Rose, now? How could they get married when he didn’t even have a single penny in his pocket? Balling his hands into fists, he imagined punching each one of the robbers in the eye. He knew he could beat them up if they didn’t all come at him at the same time. Blowing air through his lips, he struggled to rein in his temper.

Michael’s quiet tone soon filled the room. “It won’t do you any good being angry. Yes, your money is gone. But, the reason why I’d said the Lord was looking out for you was because you were wearing that thick makeup. The doctor said the cut could’ve been much worse if you hadn’t had that makeup on.”

Pushing the pastor’s words from his mind, he glanced at both of them. “I want my money back.” He needed to get back into the world, find a way to survive and he had to find Rose. He looked away from Thelma and Michael, using all his strength, he pushed himself off of the bed, determined to leave this room so that he could search for Rose. His legs wobbled like jelly and Michael caught him, saving him from hitting the floor. Tears flooded his eyes and determination to find Rose seared his soul like a scorching torch. Michael and Thelma forced him to lie back down.

 Thelma’s dark eyes sparkled with tears and pity. Jack winced. He didn’t need her tears or pity. He needed to find Rose! He recalled the doctor telling him he’d been drugged, but, Jack realized he’d been sleeping for hours. There was no way that he was still doped up on medicine! Glaring at Michael and Thelma he voiced his question. “What’s wrong with me? Why can’t I stand up?”

**Chapter 10**

Four whole days, and I’d still received no word from Jack. I rolled over in the bed, staring out the window. The sleepy sounds of New York residents awakening drifted through the glass. The rumble of the engine of a lone car moving down the street resonated in my ears. Sniffing, and rubbing my red tired eyes, I pulled myself out of bed, and stared into the semi-dark street. I glanced at the clock – six thirty. I’d had a hard time sleeping last night. I kept dreaming about Jack, refusing to admit that Miranda had been right. Taking a handkerchief, I blew my nose, continuing to look outside. A milk deliveryman pulled up to the door and left bottles of cold milk that were nestled in a steel, cage-like carrier. He appeared to sense that I stared because he then looked up at the window, winked, and tipped his hat. Upset to be caught staring, I gave him a brief wave back, stepping away from the window.

I glanced at Miranda. Her deep snores filled the room. Each day she’d asked me if I’d heard from Jack, but, she’d been far from sympathetic. Her gloating stare riled my nerves, making me loathe her personality. Yawning, I figured I needed some time to just think and try to figure out why Jack had abandoned me. I’d always thought of myself as a good judge in character, plus, I felt, deep in my heart, that Jack really did love me.

It was hard for me to admit that I was wrong.

I pulled my robe from the hook in the closet. Since the sinking, some other people had come forward, giving gifts of charity to the survivors. Mrs. Roker had taken us to a building where they dispensed belongings. Me, Miranda, and Cecile had gotten some clothing, handkerchiefs, shoes and other items that we’d need for daily living. Cecile had rattled my nerves when she looked through the donated items, sniffing them, barely touching them, as if she thought the donated clothing were contagious or something. The girl’s nose was stuck so far in the air that I wondered why she even bothered staying with Mrs. Roker. Didn’t she have any rich friends to stay with? She still refused to speak to me and Miranda. She only spoke to Mrs. Roker when it was absolutely necessary.

I stepped into the hall, listening, discovering I was probably the only person awake. Suddenly I realized noises were coming from the kitchen. Figuring Geri, Mrs. Roker’s housekeeper, had already arrived, I stepped down the stairs and pushed the kitchen door open. I spotted Geri leaning out the other kitchen door which led outside, bringing in the bottles of milk that the milkman had just delivered. The light rattle of the bottles tinkled in the kitchen as she set them on the counter. Her dark brown eyes widened when she saw me and she jumped. “My goodness, Lily, I didn’t know you were awake.”

“I didn’t mean to startle you.”

She removed her wrap, placing it on a hook in the corner. “Have a seat.”

I glanced at the table for a few seconds before gingerly sitting in the wooden chair. I desperately needed a friend, someone who could help me to reason through all that had been tormenting me lately. The few times I’d been able to fall asleep, dreams of Jack filled my mind. I didn’t realize that I’d started crying again until Geri slipped a white handkerchief into my fingers. “Are you missing your loved ones from the ship?” asked Geri.

I nodded, realizing that her statement aptly described how I felt. “It’s kind of complicated.”

Geri glanced at the clock on the wall. “I have about a half hour before I have to start breakfast. I usually read my Bible right now, but since you’re feeling so bad, I’ll just talk to you.”

I frowned, fisting the handkerchief in my fingers. “You read your Bible every day?”

She nodded, her mocha-colored skin gleaming in the weak sunlight. “Yes, I do. Lily, we don’t understand all that happens to us in our lives, but, we need to lean on the Lord to get us through it.” She gestured toward the coffee container. “Can I make you some coffee?”

*Coffee! Yuck!* I’d noticed since I’d been lamenting about Jack over the last few days, that scents of some things had turned weird. For example, lately, whenever the scent of freshly-brewed coffee wafted through the kitchen, I thought it smelled like dirt. I pushed the thought away, not wanting to tell Geri how I felt about the scent of coffee. She’d probably think I was weird, thinking that coffee smelled like dirt. Sniffing, I gestured toward the canister of chocolate. “I’d like a cup of hot chocolate if you don’t mind.”

She grinned, showing the dimple in her left cheek. “With whipped cream?”

I nodded. “Lots of whipped cream.” Geri made the best hot chocolate I’d ever tasted in my life. She stood over the stove, dropping cocoa powder into a small pot. She then removed one of the bottles of milk from the steel cage. She opened it, pouring a liberal amount into the chocolate powder. After turning the burner on, she added some sugar and a few other things. It didn’t take long for the chocolate to heat up, the sweet aromatic smell filling the kitchen, momentarily making me forget about my troubles.

“So, you want to talk about what’s got you crying so hard? You miss your family?”

I sniffed, relishing the sweet chocolate smell. “I miss Jack. I love him.”

“Jack? Who’s that? Is he your boyfriend?”

I nodded. Forcing myself to remain calm, I told about how I’d met Jack while on the Titanic. “He saved me.” I told her about his kisses and how we’d said we loved one another. In a rush, I told her about my stupid mother and about my planned marriage to Cal. “I can’t stand Cal. I hate him.”

“It’s not right not hate.”

I shook my head. “I don’t care. Cal doesn’t love me. Not the way that Jack loves me. I want to see Jack so bad that it hurts, right here.” I said, pointing toward my heart.

She poured the hot chocolate into a thick ceramic mug. After placing a dollop of whipped cream on the top, she presented me with my morning drink, rubbing my shoulder. “I think you need to pray about Jack. I can’t tell you for sure if he’s coming back, but, from what you’d said, I think he might.”

I gasped, excited that her words were giving me hope. “You really think he’ll be back?”

She nodded. “I think so. But, we need to pray about it. Ya hear? He doesn’t sound like a man who’d abandon a woman. Maybe something bad has happened to him.”

I frowned, staring into my cup of hot chocolate. “Something bad? Like what?”

“Well, what about that Cal person? You’d said that he was after you on the ship. Maybe he’s found Jack and is causing trouble for him.”

I sat up straighter in my chair, gazing into Geri’s warm kind brown eyes. “You think so?” I glanced around the kitchen, trying to make sense of things. “Maybe Jack’s sitting in jail somewhere, alone, penniless.” How could I help him when I had little money of my own? Had Cal somehow managed to find Jack and have him falsely arrested? I thought about the necklace that I was hiding upstairs. Was Jack in jail, right now, because of The Heart Of The Ocean?

Geri patted my shoulder. “Don’t go jumping to conclusions. I’m just saying that something may have happened to him and it might be awhile until he can find you, but, if we pray real hard, maybe God will cause a miracle to happen and Jack will return.”

I nodded. What else could I do? I had to pray. I bowed my head, closing my eyes as Geri’s clear strong voice filled the kitchen, praying, begging the Lord to send Jack back to me. After we’d said our amens, I took a sip of hot chocolate. The warm, sweet cocoa liquid slid down my throat. A drop slid to the edge of my lips and I licked it away with my tongue. I closed my eyes again, enjoying another drink of chocolate, relishing the whipped cream as the concoction lingered on my tongue. Licking my lips, I hugged the warm mug in my cold hands. “Geri, do you believe in miracles?”

Geri moved to the refrigerator, removing a carton of eggs. Taking her time, she broke some eggs into a china bowl. “Do I believe in miracles?” She grinned, as if she were keeping a secret. Her eyes twinkled as she responded. “Yes, I do.”

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Jack laid on the small cot, huddled beneath a warm cotton blanket. He glanced around the now-familiar church office, breathing deeply. Pastor Michael slept in a cot in the adjacent room, his deep snores carrying down the little hallway. Since Jack’s accident, the doctor had said it was best if Jack was not moved for at least a week. Jack had been stunned to find out that he couldn’t walk because his leg had been broken. The doctor had fitted a splint around his leg, and had said, in due time, Jack would be able to get around using crutches. Jack shook the thought away. Him, using crutches? He fisted the blanket, still gazing at his surroundings.

Taking a deep breath, he realized his bladder was full and he needed to use the privy. The doctor had not had a spare set of crutches, but, promised Jack he’d try and find some soon. The echo of the front door to the church opened, settling into the atmosphere. Jack winced, wondering if Thelma were coming so early in the morning. “Hi, you’re up.” Thelma’s bright voice filled the room and Jack felt a bit better.

Embarrassed, he spoke up. “Hi, Thelma. I need to go to the privy.” He’d finally managed to hobble to the privy on his own, but, still needed someone to help him get out of bed and get his balance before he ventured to the privy. Thelma placed a brown paper sack onto the desk before she came toward him, assisting him out of the bed. Using her as an anchor, he got out of bed and leaned on her, and using the wall for balance, they made their way to the privy. Several minutes later, they returned and Jack stumbled back into bed, glad he’d been relieved. After he’d used the privy, he’d taken a moment to study his face. His beard and mustache had started to grow in, and his bruises were starting to fade, but, he still looked frightful.

He sat up in bed and his stomach rumbled with hunger. Thelma gave him a sandwich and a cup of hot coffee. After he’d enjoyed his breakfast, he studied Thelma, noticing her red-rimmed eyes. “What’s the matter?”

She gasped. “What makes you think something’s wrong?”

He shrugged. “Sorry. You just look like you’ve been crying.”

She pursed her full lips, staring at the weak sunlight shining through the window. “I’m having trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?”

She sighed, looking as if the weight of the entire world rested on her shoulders. “I’m in love.”

Chuckling, Jack sat up straighter, lifting the pad of paper and pencil that Pastor Michael had gotten for him. It wasn’t his fancy sketch pad and pencils, but, they’d do. “Go ahead and tell me about your love trouble. I’m listening.”

She chuckled softly, wiping a stray tear down her cheek. “You ain’t listening to me. You’re drawing.”

Giving her a small smile, he continued to draw, finding comfort in having a pencil in his fingers. “I’m listening to you. Being in love is great. Why are you crying about it?”

“Because I’m in love with Paul Gale.”

Jack continued to draw, grunting. “Who’s Paul Gale? What’s wrong with being in love with him?” He stopped drawing, looking at her briefly. “I’ll bet he loves you, doesn’t he?”

Her mouth dropped open and she gasped. “Why, yes, he does love me.”

He shrugged, continuing to draw. “So, what’s the problem?”

“He’s a quadroon.”

“He’s a what?”

“A quadroon. He’s only one-quarter Black, and he’s three-quarters white. He’s got this almost-white skin, dark hair, gray eyes and he’s tall and he’s got some huge muscles. He works in the lumber yard and I see him every weekend. He walked me over here before he left this morning for the week.” She stopped speaking, staring at the window. “The problem is, other Black people, who are darker skinned like me, look down upon us. They don’t think I should be dating a quadroon. A lot of people in the congregation think I should be dating a regular, darker Black person.”

Jack scoffed, dropping his pencil. “That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.”

She shook her head, standing, retrieving his pencil for him. “But, it’s true Jack. The negative reactions are wearing me down, making me depressed. I love him, and I wish everybody I knew, including other Black people, would accept him, accept us, as a couple.”

Jack accepted the pencil from Thelma’s brown fingers. “Thelma, let me tell you something. I almost lost my life on the Titanic. Coming so close to death made me appreciate all that we can enjoy while we’re alive. You can’t let other people stop you from falling in love.” He looked into her eyes, deep into her eyes. “Paul loves you and you love him. The two of you will be happy. The both of you will get married and have lots of babies.”

Thelma shook her head. “I want to believe that, Jack. Really, I do, but, I don’t know if that’ll ever happen.” She lowered her voice. “Paul’s family wants him to marry a light-skinned Black girl, or, another quadroon. They don’t want him to marry a dark-skinned Black woman like me.”

Jack shook his head, staring at the picture he’d sketched, before gazing at Thelma again. “Listen to me, don’t pay them any attention.” He softened his voice, hoping his message would get through to her. “Life is too short. What if you were to die next year? Wouldn’t you want to spend every day of your life here on earth with Paul?”

Thelma slowly nodded. “What makes you think Paul and I are getting married? You’ve never met him, so how do you know about his feelings for me?”

Jack fingered the pad of paper. “I can just sense that’s what’ll happen between you two. You can’t let other people’s feelings get you down. You just need to enjoy being with Paul and be happy,” Jack advised. He sighed, changing the subject. He pointed to the paper sack on the desk. “What’s in the bag?”

Thelma jumped up. “Oh, I almost forgot! I was walking over here this morning and I saw the most beautiful lilies sprouting in the park.” She pulled the flowers out of the bag, the vivid purple color was like a ray of light, and the deep floral scent seemed to burst into the office. “I thought I could put these lilies in that vase over there to cheer you up.”

Jack blinked, a memory swirling in the corner of his mind. “Lily….”

“You say something?” Thelma pulled the vase from the mantle, placing the flowers into the glass container.

“Lily…something about Lily….” He squeezed his eyes shut, thinking hard.

Thelma’s voice caught as she rushed toward him. “Jack, what’s wrong?”

“I’m remembering something.” Breathing deeply, he recalled the day the Carpathia pulled into New York. He remembered the tree where he stood with Rose, seeing the vivid blue necklace, then, Rose’s sweet voice burst into his memory like a ray of sunshine, *“They needed my name to place on the roster for the rooming house. Jack, I’m still scared that Cal might find me. I told them my name was Lily Jackson.”*

Breathing deeply, his heart pounded. “Thelma, you have got to help me find Rose. She’s using the name of Lily Jackson.”

**Chapter 11**

Sitting on the back steps of the rooming house, I bit into a peach. The juicy sweetness lingered on my tongue and I licked peach nectar from my lips. A cool breeze blew, signaling the spring day in New York would be pleasant. Geri had made fried steak and potatoes for lunch, but, I just couldn’t bring myself to eat it. I don’t know why. The smell of the steak made my stomach feel queasy. Instead, I’d eaten a piece of bread before grabbing this peach and sitting outside. The back door to the kitchen stood open and the screen door was shut, allowing the breeze to cool the hot kitchen. I heard the rest of the girls eating their meal, the scrape of utensils against plates floating outside on the air.

Finishing the peach, I threw the pit into the small backyard. Since coming to live in Mrs. Roker’s home, I’d found that my table manners, my genteel upbringing, had pretty much gone out the window. Yes, I hated that I didn’t have my own room, and I hated doing some chores around the house, but, I was just grateful that I had a place to live. Sighing, I stood and leaned against the house, thinking about The Heart Of The Ocean. What would I do? What should I do? I still feared Cal – what would he do if he ever found me?

My breath caught, apprehension swirled through me and I started to shake, closing my eyes. Then, I remembered Jack’s strong, confident voice, reminding me that I was a strong woman and that I could survive. “I’m a survivor,” I mumbled to myself, leaning against the cool wall. Taking a deep breath, I longed to walk, leave the rooming house alone for an outing. I went back into the house, got my shawl and my house key before stepping toward the front door. I gasped when I saw Cecile, standing in the living room, staring at me. She looked frightful, pale, and skinny as a stick. Her lips were painted with a vivid red lipstick and her ice-blue eyes collided with mine with the speed of a freight train. She opened her mouth, as if she were about to speak, but then she quickly closed it, as if recalling that she did not want to speak to me.

I had no idea what this girl’s problem was! She barely ate, she didn’t speak, she was rail-thin, but her face was beautiful. Refusing to give Cecile any further thought, I rushed outside, slamming the door behind me, anxious to take a walk in New York City. A few well-dressed men walked passed, sporting business suits and smoking cigarettes. A haggard woman crossed the street, pushing a baby carriage. I sighed, glancing up and down the street, wondering which direction I should go.

I finally went left, and I walked and walked, breathing in the sights and smells of New York. The streets cluttered with cars and horse-drawn wagons. Clumps of horse dung settled on the streets, making my stomach churn. I walked for so long that I needed something to drink. I looked up, spotting a chic-looking coffee house. I spied the front table, and the woman sitting at the table looked right at me and I gasped.

It was my mother.

I know it’d shocked her to see me. Her mouth dropped open, and my mother wouldn’t be caught dead gawking at someone with her mouth open like that. I was about to rush away, but, I recalled some of the stuff that I’d been learning from Geri. She’d mentioned that the Lord didn’t like fear.

I could no longer fear my mother.

I then recalled how abusive Cal had been to my mom when he couldn’t find me on the Carpathia. Maybe she’d had some time to reflect and she’d changed her mind about my marrying Cal?

Not giving my decision further thought, I marched into the coffee house, going directly to my mom’s table. She glared at me while I sat, and my heart pounded. Had I just made a mistake? Maybe my mom was still in contact with Cal and she’d tell him that she’d seen me? I blinked, bringing my mother’s face into focus. Her cheeks were sunken and she wore no makeup. Her wild red hair was fixed into a bun and she sipped coffee from a steaming china mug. “Rose, where the hell have you been?” She wore a brown dress that was much too big for her. It hung at the bosom and around her shoulders and I flinched, realizing my mother had lost weight since the ship’s sinking.

*Lord, give me strength.* “None of your business. Are you here by yourself?” I glanced around the coffee house, not wanting Cal to be lurking in a corner somewhere.

My mom pursed her lips, taking another delicate sip of coffee. “If you must know, yes, I’m here alone.” She gestured to a shop across the street. “I work over there.” She shook her head, a frown marring her face. “The owner hired me to be a seamstress. He has a spare room above the shop and that’s where I’ve been sleeping.” She shuttered, tears crowding her green eyes. “No thanks to you. If you’d married Cal, then I wouldn’t be in this mess.”

I grimaced. “Cal’s abusive and you know it.” I almost told her that I’d seen him act abusive toward her, but, I stopped myself, not wanting her to know about me and Jack’s costumes. I didn’t want her to know that I was the old lady who had witnessed Cal giving her a hard time about not being able to find me.

She pursed her lips, her green eyes sparkling with anger. “He’s only abusive if he loses his temper. If you’d learn to control yourself then we wouldn’t be in this mess!” She shook with anger, and hot coffee sloshed from the edge of the cup that she held. “Ouch!” She dropped her china cup and it shattered against the saucer.

A waiter appeared. “Trouble over here, miss?” The waiter then glared at me, as if I were the one who’d broken my mother’s china cup.

I took some deep breaths, hoping my mother learned to control her anger. I’d never seen my mother shake so much. She pressed her hand to her forehead, as if warding off a headache. “I believe I’m not feeling well.”

The waiter lifted the pieces of broken china. “I’ll bring you another cup of coffee.”

My mother refused to look at me once the waiter had left, holding her forehead into her hands, her skinny arms shaking like leaves. She looked frightful, and I wondered how long I was going to resort to sitting at this table with her. She finally looked into my eyes. “Why did you come in here?” She fisted the white tablecloth in her bony fingers, agitated.

Why had I come in here? Before I could respond, the waiter returned, bringing a fresh pot of coffee. The scent filled the air, making my stomach churn. What the heck was wrong with my queasy stomach? I held my stomach, forcing the bile back down into my throat. The waiter looked at me again, as if I were responsible for my mother’s demise. “Do you want me to bring you a cup?” he asked me.

I wanted a cup of hot chocolate, but, I had no money. I paused, wondering if my mother would find it in her heart to let me have a cup of hot chocolate. Could she spare the change since she was probably as poor as I? I studied her, swallowing my pride. My mouth suddenly watered, wanting the hot chocolate so badly. Another waiter walked by, holding a small tray of sandwiches and pretty little cakes. I had not had lunch except for the peach and bread, so, now I wanted nourishment. I wish I could have those cakes and sandwiches with some hot chocolate. The scent from my mother’s coffee wafted toward me, making me queasy again. I clutched my stomach. “Might I get a cup of hot chocolate?”

 My mother’s sharp eyes watched me like a hawk while she fixed her cup of coffee. She glanced at the waiter. “Get the girl a cup of hot chocolate and a plate of sandwiches and cakes.” I swallowed, almost embarrassed that my mother had witnessed me ogling the food. Before I could say thanks, she asked another question. “What’s the matter with you? You look awful. Are you sick?”

Right now, I felt sick. “I’m fine,” I lied.

She shook her head, glaring at me. “I shouldn’t have ordered you those sandwiches and cakes. You’ll probably gorge on them, not having a bit of decency while you eat. You never could control your appetite,” she spat, sipping her coffee, her hands shaking.

“If you didn’t want me to eat them, then you should not have ordered them for me!” I stood, refusing to subject myself to my mother’s mental abuse any longer. I was leaving this coffee house. If I stayed, I might lose my temper and slap my mother’s sunken face!

“Sit down!” My mother commanded, gesturing toward the chair. “Don’t get so mad.” She took another sip of coffee. Lowering her voice, she assessed me with her cold green eyes. “I needed to talk to you anyway.”

The queasiness left my stomach and I dropped into the chair, taking deep steady breaths, trying to calm myself down.

“Don’t slouch. Sit up properly. Even if you have no money, you’re still a lady.” She set her coffee cup down, and I attempted to sit up straighter in the chair. The waiter returned, bearing a tray of little sandwiches and tasty-looking cakes. Not caring what my mother thought, I took a sandwich, biting into it, realizing the crust-less bread was slathered with cream cheese and cucumbers. I ate all of the little sandwiches before eating the cakes. The cakes were moist vanilla cake with hard, sweet icing. After eating, I resisted the urge to lick my fingers. My mother glared at me, and I could tell that she abhorred my healthy appetite. She lifted her coffee cup, making sure her pinky finger was raised into the air, the proper way to drink coffee. “Where are you staying? Are you shacking up with that vagabond who stole Cal’s necklace?”

I winced, not wanting to talk about Jack. “I’m not shacking up with any man.” I took a generous sip of my hot chocolate, realizing it didn’t taste as good as Geri’s.

My mom had the nerve to chuckle. “I’ll bet that thief has already left you. He’s probably trying to find another rich girl to take advantage of.” Thoughts of Jack with another woman filled my mind. Was he really after a rich girl? I again recalled Jack’s kind spirit. He would never try and shack up with a woman just for money. *Would he?*

I gazed around the elegant coffee house, noting the fancy paintings on the muted walls and the well-dressed people populating the small round tables. I blinked, trying to get control of my emotions. I couldn’t let my mother rattle me like this. I gritted my teeth. “Why are you here, drinking coffee?” Could my mother even afford to drink here? Why would she waste money on a cup of coffee here?

Her lips tilted into a frown as she stared at her floral-patterned china cup. “The owner of this coffee shop has three daughters. He comes to the seamstress shop where I work. He said I was welcome to come over here to eat and drink whenever I wanted as long as I gave him a discount whenever his daughter’s dresses needed adjusting. He also gets a discount when he buys material for his daughters’ dresses.” A pudgy, well-dressed young girl walked by our table. She appeared to only be about fifteen years old. My mother leaned toward me, as if we were the best of friends. “See that girl? That’s one of the coffee-house owner’s daughters. She eats too much food. All of his daughters are fat as butterballs and the owner of the seamstress shop told me that they’re always coming in for adjustments to their dresses because of their weight gain.” My mom shuttered, placing her china coffee cup back into the saucer. “Those girls need to learn some restraint. They’ll never find husbands looking like fat hens.” She shook her head, her eyes narrowing with anger. “Now do you understand why I always want you to watch your weight?”

I refused to respond while my mother eyed me from head to toe, assessing me. “We need to decide what to do with you.”

I resisted the urge to leave, wondering what my mother was talking about. “What do you mean?”

“Well, you refuse to marry Cal, but, even though he’s now out of the picture, we may be able to get you another suitor.” She cringed, glaring across the street at the seamstress shop. A man stood in the window of the sewing establishment, placing a garment across a mannequin. She then gritted her teeth, forcing her jaws to grind together. This was something my mother did when she abhorred something, or, when she was very angry. “I hate working over there.” She spoke in a low tone, but, her voice brimmed with anger. Breathing heavily, she continued to speak. “I wasn’t born to serve others.” Abruptly, she stopped speaking, looking toward me, her glacial green eyes glaring at me with darts of anger. “All because you wouldn’t marry Cal, I have to subject myself to working.” She shuddered. “If you refuse to marry Cal, we need to think of a plan for you to marry somebody else.” She then gazed into her cup of coffee, as if she could find the answers to her problems within the steaming brown brew. “My friends have shunned me, but, I still have a few contacts from our old acquaintances. They might be able to help us find somebody for you to meet.” She looked up at me. “You’re a striking woman Rose and I know you don’t want to subject yourself to this current lifestyle any longer.”

I struggled to rein in my emotions. My mother had just said I was striking. I’d never heard my mother give me a compliment about my looks in my entire life. All she did was find fault with me, trying to make me diet so that I could be more attractive to potential suitors. Mentally, I sighed, wishing my father were still alive. I thought about Liam, whom I’d met on the Carpathia. It’d felt nice to have an older man to care about me and look after me. I missed my father so much that it hurt, and my mother’s attitude didn’t help much.

I paused, not sure what to say. Should I tell my mom that I was stunned that she’d given me a compliment?

A waiter walked by, bearing a fresh pot of coffee. The scent wafted toward me, and the queasiness settled into my stomach again. Bile rose into my throat since I’d just gobbled cakes and sandwiches. Saying a silent prayer and closing my eyes, I waited for the queasy feeling to pass.

“What’s wrong with you?” My mother’s voice was not full of compassion. She sounded annoyed, and I realized I needed to tell her the truth. My mother already thought I was weird and unruly anyway, so, telling her the truth would not alter her negative opinion of me.

I swallowed, gripping the edge of the table, trying to calm myself down. The waiter walked by again and I signaled to him. “Could you please bring me a glass of water over ice?”

The waiter nodded. He left and returned a couple of minutes later carrying a lone glass of clear, refreshing water over ice cubes. Taking a deep breath, I guzzled the liquid until it was all gone. A drop of water slid down the side of my face and down my neck and I was too tired to wipe it away. This had been an emotional day and I no longer cared about manners, even though my mother sat across from me.

“Rose, your face!” She handed me a napkin and I wiped the moisture from the side of my mouth and on my neck. The water had calmed me and got rid of my queasy feeling. I leaned back into my chair, relieved that I was feeling better.

“Mother, I haven’t been feeling well lately.” I figured it was because I was lovesick and I was depressed since Jack had abandoned me. However, I couldn’t share these thoughts with my mom.

“What do you mean you haven’t been feeling well? Are you ill?”

I shook my head, fingering the floral pattern on my china cup. “Oh, no, not ill. I think I’m just emotional because of the Titanic sinking. It was so devastating that I think it’s wreaking emotional havoc with me. I’ve had a few nightmares.”

My mother nodded, as if she understood. She looked out on the street for a few seconds, as if her mind were elsewhere. “What else has been happening to you besides the nightmares? You just looked like you were sick a few moments ago.”

I sighed. “Mother, it’s kind of weird.” I paused. *Should I tell her about the coffee?* Throwing caution to the wind, I confided to her. “I can’t drink coffee anymore.”

She raised her thin eyebrows, and I could tell she was confused. “What on earth do you mean? You’ve been drinking coffee every morning for years.”

I nodded. “I know, but, since we docked in New York, coffee has been weird.”

She threw her hands up into the air, clearly exasperated. “What do you mean?”

I took a deep breath and told her. “The smell of coffee makes me sick. I think it smells like dirt.”

She jerked back, her green eyes widening. I could tell she was shocked, and I had no idea why. She grabbed my hand, her bony fingers biting into my flesh. “I want you to listen to me. You have to answer my question when I ask you, okay?”

I winced at the pain she was causing to my hand, but, I nodded. What in the world was wrong with my mom?

“When we were on the Titanic, did you sleep with that boy…” she shuddered, as if uttering Jack Dawson’s name would commit her to the gates of hell.

Taking another deep breath, I nodded. “Yes, I slept with Jack and it was the most amazing experience of my life.”

“Oh, dear God in heaven.” She took a white linen napkin and fanned herself, closing her eyes. I wondered if she would faint.

“Mom, what’s wrong?” She was shaking like a leaf, her thin body looking like a shattering stick.

“Rose, do you know why coffee smells like dirt to you?”

I shook my head, still staring at my mother. *What was wrong with her?*

She finally told me why my sense of smell was making me queasy. “Rose, you’re not ill. You’re pregnant with that hooligan’s baby. Dear God in heaven, help us.” Then my mother fainted, passing out right in her chair, her eyes closing.

I gasped, my heart rate accelerating*. I was pregnant with Jack Dawson’s baby?*

**Chapter 12**

Jack shuffled into the crowded church, dropping into a back pew. A myriad of people, in every shade of brown imaginable, filled the sanctuary. A dark-skinned man with gray, cotton-ball-like hair pounded on the piano keys, causing holy notes to fill the warm air. A choir, sporting mismatched robes in a myriad of colors, swayed back and forth to the soulful music. Pastor Michael had confided that they’d not had enough money to purchase the same color and style of choir robes for their members. They’d only had enough money to purchase some discontinued robes in many colors, hoping and praying that the robes would fit their choir members.

Michael had chuckled when he’d continued speaking, telling that the choir robes had been a perfect fit for all their members. Jack stared as the choir swayed, their bodies moving in perfect rhythm to the music, creating a rainbow of color behind the podium. Looking away from the choir, he focused on the congregation populating the wooden pews. Some of the pews had been scratched and scarred. A few of the stained-glass windows had been cracked. Pastor Michael had also confided that they were renting this church for a huge price. “Although it’s in a bad neighborhood, and the rent is kind of high, it’s all we could find. Most blacks find it impossible to own property. Since our incomes are so low, we’re forced to rent, and we’re at the mercy of our landlord. These pews were donated by a white church in another state.”

Some of the congregation members bestowed him with icy glares, and Jack inwardly winced. Ever since he’d recalled that Rose was going by the name of Lily Jackson, he was still having a hard time finding her. He knew she stayed at a rooming house, but, he wasn’t sure which one. Pastor Michael had commissioned some of his congregation members to search, but, so far, they’d come up empty. “Do you realize how many rooming houses they have in New York, Jack?” he’d asked.

Jack sighed, trying to smile at the members that glared at him. Some of the congregation members resented having him as a part of their church. This was Jack’s first church service since the Carpathia had landed. He’d been too ill to attend before now. Although several members of the congregation realized his plight, and welcomed him with open arms, others weren’t so open-minded. He closed his eyes, blocking out the angry stares of the brown-complexioned congregants. He swayed to the music, enjoying the rhythm.

Feeling a tug on his sleeve, his eyes popped open and he saw a little girl and her mother sitting behind him. The little mocha-colored child grinned, showing several missing teeth. “Don’t worry, Mr. Jack,” she whispered. “I like you.” She then pressed her lips against his cheek. He recalled meeting the girl briefly when she’d come to visit the church with her mother earlier in the week. Taking a moment to think, he recalled her name was Reba.

He returned her grin, his skin still moist from her impromptu, sloppy kiss. The child must’ve noticed the icy glares from the other parishioners. *Lord, why can’t everybody just get along?* He spotted Thelma and a man whom he presumed was Paul sitting in the corner. If he hadn’t known better, he’d have thought that Paul was a white man with a dark tan. He recalled that Thelma had said that Paul was a quadroon – one quarter Negro. He sighed, realizing that although the entire congregation did not accept Paul’s and Thelma’s romance, that Paul had a better chance of being accepted into this church since he was at least partially Black.

After the music had died down, Pastor Michael stepped up to the podium. “I’m sure all of you realize that the young man sitting in the back is Jack Dawson, a Titantic survivor suffering from partial memory loss.” Jack cringed, not wanting to draw attention to himself. It appeared that at least half the congregation hated him, and after Pastor Michael’s speech, they’d probably hate him even more. A few people murmured and several congregants gave Jack a warm smile. He returned their smiles, hoping he’d get well soon so that he could come up with a survival plan for himself and Rose.

Pastor Michael continued. “As most of you know, Jack was attacked when he came into this neighborhood so that he could go to a pawn shop to get some artist pencils. I think we should take up a collection for Jack so that he can buy the things he needs to make his drawings.”

Murmurings rumbled through the church, filling the air with noise. Jack closed his eyes, too embarrassed to look at the parishioners who frowned upon his being there, sure that most hated the fact that they were helping to support a White person with a charitable cause. Flexing his fingers, he itched to take a pad of paper and a pencil to sketch. Sketching helped to relieve the tension in this world – a world that seldom made any sense. Before the Titanic sinking, he’d been happy, free as a lark, making his way from town to town, sketching people to make a living. Now, his optimistic attitude had popped like the air escaping from a busted balloon. Why hadn’t Pastor Michael told him that that he was making a plea to his church?

Soon, the tinkling sound of metal against metal resounded in the church. Jack’s eyes popped open and he spotted parishioners stepping out of their scarred pews, coming forward, dropping money into the collection plate located in the front of the church. Several people glared at him, refusing to offer assistance. Pastor Michael stepped back up to the podium, speaking in his naturally loud voice. “I know some of you are apprehensive about helping a white man. But let me tell you, the Lord frowns upon your thinking that way. Put your negative thoughts and feelings aside and help Jack. Remember, if you bless others then you, yourself, will be blessed.”

Finally, amidst more grumbling, several of the griping members stepped forward, dropping their coins into the collection plate. Jack breathed a sound of relief, realizing he just might now have enough coins to purchase his art supplies. Also, if he ever made some decent money from his drawings, he’d need to remember to come to this church and give money back to church since they’d helped him in his time of need.

After the collection had been taken, the choir sang more songs as notes from the piano spilled into the air, filling the church with rocking, holy music. Pastor Michael then told his sermon about helping others, using the example about The Good Samaritan. In the midst of his sermon, Michael banged his fist against the podium, sweat glistening on his nut-brown skin. “A man was attacked and beaten by thieves.” He shook his head, taking a sip from the glass of water on the small end table. “A priest and a Levite both passed the man, refusing to help, but, a Samaritan came and helped the man.” He paused, looking into the face of each congregant. “So, do you want to be like the crooked priest or the Levite, or, do you want to be like the Samaritan, and do what Jesus wants you to do?” Taking a deep breath, he continued. “I want all of you to pray and think about this, think about helping Jack. I know times are hard and we don’t have much, but, just pray about it.” He lowered his voice, his face taking on a sad expression. “If Thelma and I hadn’t shown up, Jack may have died out there. I’m trying to teach all of you about God’s grace, as Christians, we need to do what’s right.”

Jack finally opened his eyes, as more people traipsed forward, dropping coins into the pile. Their expressions were not as hostile, so, he could only hope that Pastor Michael’s words had had some impact on their attitudes. After Jack’s offering was complete, Pastor Michael prayed. He prayed for certain congregation members who were suffering from financial and physical hardships. He prayed for those that were too ill to attend, and then he mentioned how the Lord had blessed those in the pulpit over the past week. After he’d said his ‘Amen’, the church dismissed. Confused, Jack eyed the congregation members leaving their pews, going toward the stairs.

Reba rushed over to Jack, tugging his hand. “Come on Mr. Jack, we’re going downstairs right now.”

Still feeling uneasy using the crutches, he stood and placed his walking sticks beneath the pit of his arms. He hated using the stairs while he was still on crutches. “Why are we going downstairs? Isn’t everybody supposed to be going home right now?”

Reba looked at Jack as if he were an idiot. “What do you mean? We always eat lunch after the service.”

 Reba’s mother rewarded Jack with a kind smile. “I guess since this is your first visit, you didn’t know about the meal.”

 Reba tugged Jack’s sleeve. “Come on.”

 Reba’s mother spoke up. “Reba, Jack’s on crutches. I think it’s best if he wait until everybody is downstairs before he goes down. That way, he can take his time and not risk bumping into anybody on his way down.”

 Finally, Jack made his way downstairs, right behind Reba and her mother. The enticing scent of food swirled through the basement, making him realize he had skipped breakfast. Tugging his arm, Reba gestured toward a table. “Come on, you can sit with me and my mom.”

 Sighing, Jack plopped into the chair, glad he’d made it down the steps without falling. As he wondered how he was going to get up and get his plate of food since he had to use his crutches to walk, Thelma miraculously approached, bearing a plate laden with fried chicken, some kind of dark green leafy vegetable, mashed potatoes and gravy and mixed vegetables. She also carried a second plate, a smaller plate, bearing a large slice of pumpkin pie. His stomach rumbled and he chuckled, glad that Thelma had brought his plates. She placed the dishes in front of him and then he noticed Paul standing behind her, holding a frosty glass of lemonade. Paul placed the drink beside Jack’s plates. “Jack, I want you to meet my boyfriend, Paul. Paul, this is Jack Dawson.” Jack shook Paul’s hand, noticing Paul’s firm handshake. The man proved as tall and muscular as Thelma had noted.

 “Paul, I’ve heard a lot about you,” Jack said with a grin.

 Thelma’s mouth dropped open, and she swatted Jack’s shoulder. Her brown skin flushed. Jack chuckled, enjoying teasing Thelma. Paul spoke. “It’s great to meet you, Jack. I hope Pastor Michael was able to collect enough money to help you out.”

 Jack shrugged. “Well, I’d appreciate every little bit.” He gestured toward the green leafy vegetable on his plate, turning his attention toward Thelma. “Is this spinach?”

 Paul chuckled, the deep rumble of his laugh sounding pleasant in the crowded, noisy basement. “Heck no, those are greens.”

 “Greens?”

 Thelma laughed. “Just eat them. I’m sure you’ll like them.”

 Jack gestured toward the pumpkin pie. “I love pumpkin pie.”

 Paul responded. “That’s not pumpkin pie, that’s sweet potato.”

 Before he started eating, Jack focused on Paul again. “I’d like to hear what it’s like being a lumberjack.”

 Paul nodded. “After you eat, I’ll be back by to talk to you.” He patted his stomach. “Thelma and I haven’t eaten yet, either. She was kind of worried about getting your food to you. She told me that you get pretty hungry during meal time.”

 Jack tasted the golden fried chicken, amazed at the salty, spicy taste of the meat. The creamy mashed potatoes with gravy swirled over his tongue, making him appreciate the worth of good food. The sweet potato pie that topped off his meal proved glorious. Reba chatted away the whole time, and her mother had to remind her to eat her food and not talk so much.

 After the meal, Paul returned and told Jack all about being a lumberjack. Jack nodded a lot, enjoying hearing about Paul’s profession. They were interrupted when Thelma came over with a thick cloth sack. “Jack! Daddy counted the money and we think we have enough for your art supplies and enough left over for you to use for other things!”

 Touched, Jack took a deep breath, again amazed at the generosity of Michael’s congregation members. Taking a deep breath, he took his crutches from underneath the table and stood. “Jack where are you going?” asked Thelma.

 He didn’t respond as he hobbled up to the front of the basement. Balancing on his crutches, he spoke. “Everybody, I just want to thank everybody for your generosity. It means so much to me and…” He paused, looking at the sea of brown faces. “I just want you to know that I feel blessed today. Pastor Michael’s sermon made me realize that I need to place the Lord first in my life from now on.” He took a deep breath, gathering more courage as he continued to speak. He spoke of his parents dying, his nomad lifestyle, his passion for art, his time on the Titanic, and the last thing he spoke about was his true love, Rose DeWitt Bukater. “I love Rose, and I’m determined to find her. I know she’s using the name of Lily Jackson.” He closed his eyes briefly, gathering more courage as he spoke. He’d even seen a few of the women shed tears as he told of people dying on the ship wreck and about his deep love for Rose. “So, if you don’t mind, say a prayer for me, say a prayer so that I can find Lily Jackson.” He tapped his forehead. “I feel like I’m forgetting something, something important that will help me find her.” He explained that it’d taken him a long time to recall that Rose had used an alias since she didn’t want certain people to find her.

 Once he hobbled away from the front of the basement, the church members started clapping. The clapping intensified, filling the basement with a wonderful sound. Before he could get to his seat, Reba’s mother pulled him forward and soon, the entire congregation surrounded Jack in a circle, including those who had not initially accepted him into their church. As if by silent agreement, everybody joined hands and Pastor Michael’s voice boomed throughout the basement. “Lord, thank you for this wonderful day.” During the pastor’s prayer, there was a lot of murmuring and people speaking to the Lord, and many people said “yes, yes,” agreeing with Pastor Michael’s words.

Pastor Michael then ended his prayer by stating, “Lord, please help Jack with his memory. Please help him to find his true love, Rose.” Jack’s eyes remained closed and, his hands stayed on his crutches. Even after Michael had said ‘Amen’, Jack still stood in the midst of the circle his eyes shut.

“Jesus,” Jack mumbled. “Please help me to find Rose.” A tingling sensation started from the top of his head and traveled down his back, making him feel warm and liquid, like a mass of jelly. His entire body radiated with warmth and an unexplainable energy quivered through him. He dropped his crutches and almost crashed to the floor before somebody caught him, and eased his body onto the cold, hard floor. The cold floor felt good against his warm, energetic body.

 “Lawd have mercy! Jack’s been touched by the Holy Spirit!” A parishioner’s voice echoed in the room, but, Jack barely noticed. Taking deep breaths, he tried to figure out what was happening to him.

 *Lord, help me.* A glorious sensation filled him and he cried out, gasping with pleasure. Then, from out of nowhere, he recalled standing with his beloved Rose beneath the huge oak tree after the Carpathia had landed.

*“They’re letting me stay in an all-female rooming house for free for a couple of months. They’ll be taking me there within the next hour.”*

*“Where’s the house?”*

 Rose had told him the address. His mind exploded with pleasure.

 He knew where he could find Rose. He had to go to her as soon as possible!

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I opened my eyes, forcing myself to get out of bed. It was Monday afternoon and the bright, brilliant sunlight shined through the curtains, warming my face. I’d been so sluggish and depressed lately. *Was it true? Could I really be pregnant, or, was my mother just trying to scare me?*

 I walked down to the privy and, after I’d freshened up and brushed my teeth, I made my way toward the kitchen. I couldn’t stomach eating breakfast and lunch today. The thought of food had made me feel queasy. Now, I didn’t feel so bad and I was famished! I checked the time on the clock in the hallway – 2:00. Lunch was over and I doubted anybody would be in the kitchen except for Geri. I needed to talk to her about my predicament. I had not had a chance to get any time alone with her over the last few days because I’d been too tired to get out of bed to speak with Geri before breakfast.

 I pushed the door open, entering the kitchen, and then I stopped. Geri wasn’t around but I saw Cecile at the table, and I cringed. I hated this woman! She wore her nightgown and her face was devoid of makeup. She was so skinny that she looked more like a girl instead of a woman. I was in such a bad mood that I couldn’t resist saying something. “What are you doing in the kitchen? I know you didn’t come here to eat.”

 Ignoring me, she folded her thin, stick-like arms in front of her almost-flat chest and fled from the room as if she were scared of me. Geri then came through the back door to the kitchen, bearing some grocery bags. “Lily, hi. I didn’t expect to see you in the kitchen at this time of day. I was about to start preparing dinner.”

 I rushed toward Geri, grabbing her grocery bags, setting them on the brown oak table before pulling her into a hug. Before I could help myself, I started crying so hard that I couldn’t stop. Geri didn’t seem surprised. She just held me while I cried, patting my back, cooing, treating me as if I were a sobbing child. Finally, Geri released me, stepping back. I’d stopped crying but I was a mess. My nose was running like a leaky hose, and my face was streaked with tears. I’d probably cried enough tears to fill one of Geri’s huge iron pots.

 Geri peered at me, slowly removing her coat and scarf. “I have to start dinner. Why don’t you help me and then you can tell me all about your troubles.”

 So, after I cleaned my nose and wiped my eyes, Geri put me to work, slicing vegetables for the stew that would be served later that day. In a tear-filled voice, I told her about spotting my mother at the coffee house, our conversation, and her claim about my being pregnant. I stopped slicing the carrots, dropping my sharp knife on the table. I placed my hand against my stomach, taking a deep breath before speaking. “Geri, do you really think I could be pregnant, or, do you think my mother’s trying to scare me?”

 Geri stopped cutting her potatoes. Abandoning her chore, she sat beside me, taking my shaky hand into hers. “Honey, I can’t speak about your mother’s motives because I don’t know her. But, since you’ve been staying here, I’ve sensed that you might be pregnant.”

 I gasped, holding Geri’s hand in a strong, vice-like grip, wondering about what she’d said. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

 “I wasn’t sure. But, I had a feeling that you might be pregnant when you’d said that the coffee smelled like dirt. Plus, you had trouble eating certain foods. I thought it may have been grief or nerves at first, but, when you told me about loving Jack—“

 “Oh, Jack…” I whimpered, moaning. “He’s abandoned me---“

 Geri squeezed my hand. “Honey, have faith. Even if he did abandon you, I’ll be your friend through all of this.” She paused. “It’s only been days since the sinking of the Titanic. It’s possible that Jack might appear—“

 I moaned and whimpered, cutting her off. Right now, I wish I’d had some smelling salts because a light-headed, dizzy feeling came over me while I clutched Geri’s hand. “Are you okay?” she gasped. Her dark eyes grew wide, and her brown cheeks flushed with worry.

 “I felt like I was going to faint.”

 “Maybe you should go upstairs and lie down. I could bring your dinner later tonight on a tray.”

 I sniffed, not wanting to leave Geri. Right now, she was the only friend that I had in the entire world. I gazed around the kitchen, noting the silver canisters on the counter that contained, flour, sugar and cornmeal. I saw the huge pepper grinder sitting beside the canisters and then I glanced at the large oven. Focusing on these items helped me to resume my equilibrium. Finally, my light-heading feeling vanished, and I breathed deeply. “I think I’m okay.”

 Geri gave me a shrewd look. “You haven’t eaten anything today, have you?”

 I shook my head. “I was too tired and depressed to eat. The thought of eating made me want to throw up.” I then mentioned that I’d initially been hungry when I came to the kitchen but spotting Cecile made me lose my appetite.

 Geri chuckled. “Seeing Cecile made you lose your appetite? How come?”

 I shuddered. “I don’t trust that girl. There’s something unnerving about her. Why doesn’t she ever talk?”

 Geri shrugged, standing up from the table. “I’m not sure what’s wrong with Cecile. She only speaks when she has to, I guess.”

 “Well, why is she so skinny? I’ve never seen such a thin woman. She looks like a child when she wears her nightgown. Plus why was she standing here in the kitchen wearing a nightgown in the middle of the day? Is she depressed because she may be pregnant, too?”

 Geri shook her head. “Honey, let’s not waste precious time talking about Cecile. Right now, we need to focus on you and your plight. Do you have any idea what you will do?”

 The thought of being pregnant overwhelmed me. Was I even pregnant? “Shouldn’t I see a doctor or something? Couldn’t he tell me for sure if I were pregnant?”

 “He could probably make a good guess. But, you have no money to pay for a doctor.”

 I winced, silently agreeing with Geri’s statement. I didn’t have much money to my name. I didn’t want to waste what I had on a doctor. Geri removed a carton of milk from the refrigerator and poured it into the pan on the stove. “I’m going to make you a nice, huge mug of hot chocolate with whipped cream.” After Geri served me the steaming mug of hot chocolate and a tasty sandwich, she sat beside me again at the table. “I want you to go upstairs and lie down. But, before you leave, we need to pray. Lily, you can never pray too much. You have to remember that. Promise?”

 I nodded, silently promising that I’d remember that I could never pray too much. All I had left was prayer. After all, my mother hated me, and Jack…well, I didn’t know if I’d ever see Jack again, and, I might be carrying his child in my stomach. I rubbed my hand over my stomach, saying a silent prayer for the life that may be sprouting inside of me.

 Geri grabbed my hand. “Lord, please help Lily. Please make her strong enough to withstand whatever happens to her in the future.” She paused before continuing. “Also, Lord, please help Jack. I believe Lily and Jack belong together. Please guide Jack back to us. Amen.”

 “Amen.” I squeezed Geri’s hand, and then a light, sizzling wave of shock coursed through my back. I gasped, falling back onto the chair.

 “What’s wrong?” Geri’s voice was full of worry as she gazed at me.

Before I could say anything else, we were interrupted by a knock at the front door. I gasped, for some reason, wondering if that could be Jack at the door! Had God answered my prayer and sent Jack back to me?

**Chapter 13**

 Jack knocked on the door using his uninjured leg, bracing his hands on the handles of his crutches. Taking several deep breaths, he tried to calm his nerves, grateful that Pastor Michael had dropped him off at Rose’s house. Pastor Michael had wanted to stay with Jack to be sure he’d gotten the correct address. However, Jack and told Pastor Michael that he could leave and that everything would be okay. The pastor had said that he’d be back in a few hours. *Lord, please help me. Please let Rose still be living here.*

The door opened and Jack’s heart pounded when he feasted his eyes on Rose. Both of them gasped at the same time. “Jack!” She fell into his arms, knocking him off of his crutches, forcing him to fall onto the landing of the steps of the rooming house, stumbling to the ground with a hard thud. His heart continued to pound as he squeezed his arms around her soft, wonderful body. Her lush, red-painted lips enticed him. He opened his mouth to kiss her when he noticed her eyes were now closed and body was now limp, slumped in his arms. Feeling her forehead, he lightly slapped her face, trying to revive her. *Lord, I can’t believe she’s fainted!*

 “Help!” Jack called, having a hard time standing with his broken leg, his crutches scattered on the steps and unresponsive Rose on top of him. “Help!”

 A pretty, brown-skinned Black woman came to the door. “Oh, my goodness! Somebody, come and help me get Lily! She’s fainted!”

 A woman wearing a tight-fitting dress approached, her mouth dropping open. “Who the heck are you?”

 Taking a deep breath, he introduced himself. “I’m Jack.”

 Her mouth dropped open, as if shocked. “You’re the infamous Jack? You’ve finally come for Lily? She thought you’d abandoned her.”

 The Black woman swatted the other woman. “Miranda, stop asking questions and help me take Rose into the sitting room.” She gestured toward Jack. “He’s not able to help us since he’s injured.”

 The woman named Miranda retrieved his crutches for him before she assisted the Black woman. They hoisted Rose, grunting and Jack followed them into the house. Another woman stood in the foyer, staring at him with ice-blue eyes. The woman was so pale and skinny that Jack wondered if she were ill. Ignoring the ghost-like, creepy woman, he followed the twosome into the sitting room on faltering steps, using his crutches, careful not to trip over the dark red carpet.

 Miranda and the Black woman, whom he assumed was the maid, placed Rose on the couch. Dropping his crutches, he struggled to pull a chair up to the couch, and Miranda rushed to help him. He dropped into the chair, staring at Rose, recalling that he needed to remember to call her Lily. He gave commands to the Black woman and Miranda. “Get me a cold cloth and some smelling salts if you have them.” Both women left his side, and he took the time to study Rose. Taking his fingers, he touched her bright red hair, noticing her tresses were wild, and carefree, spilling onto her pale skin. Slightly dark, faint-blue circles were beneath her eyes, as if she’d had a sleepless night. He touched the circles under her eyes, upset. He continued feeling her face, his fingers tracing her prominent cheekbones, realizing her face appeared thinner. Pressing his lips to her soft cheek, he inhaled, relishing Rose’s lovely female scent.

 Hearing light footsteps, he ended his kiss, glancing toward the entrance. He noticed the thin woman he’d seen earlier was now staring at him. Her frigid, malice-filled blue eyes caused a tingle of fear to go up his back. Forcing himself to be unafraid, he boldly returned her stare. She finally looked away, her pale skin flushing. *Lord, why does that woman give me a bad feeling?*

 “Cecile, would you get out of the way! Can’t you see we’re trying to help Lily?” The Black woman’s voice filled with exasperation as she entered, Miranda behind her. She placed the damp white cloth against Rose’s forehead while Miranda opened the pack of smelling salts.

 The Black woman spoke. “Jack, my name’s Geri.”

After giving Geri a brief nod, he gestured toward Rose. “What’s wrong with her? Has she been sick? She doesn’t look well.” His loud, worried tone echoed in the small sitting room.

 Miranda dumped the smelling salts from the package, breaking them open, placing them under Rose’s nose. “She’s been sick waiting for you. Where the hell have you been all this time?”

 “Miranda!” Geri’s disappointed tone sliced through the air like a knife. “Can’t you see that Jack’s been injured? When Rose wakes up, we need to give the two of them some time alone.”

 Miranda’s mouth clamped down, and Jack figured Geri had made Miranda angry. Miranda continued to hold the light brown colored salts under Rose’s nose.

Soon, Rose’s mesmerizing green eyes fluttered open. He leaned toward her, drinking in her beauty like a cold glass of water on a hot summer day. He stared into her emerald green eyes enjoying the flutter of her long, lush, red eyelashes. Giving her a gentle smile, he caressed her face, his body growing warm with happiness and desire. Unable to resist, he pressed his lips to hers, and their mouths joined in a long kiss.

Finally, he ended the kiss, realizing some of her hair had fallen into her face. He pushed the hair away from her face, hearing the slight noise of the door closing behind him, realizing that Geri and Miranda had left them alone. Rose’s lush red lips parted, giving him a slight view of her white teeth. “Jack, you came back.” Tears poured from her eyes while her fingers stroked his newly-grown beard.

He chuckled, giddy with happiness, his face close to hers. “Don’t cry. Of course I came back. I love you, Rose. Remember, I jump, you jump?”

 She stroked his face for several minutes and Jack closed his eyes, relishing the feel of her soft, wonderful fingers on his heated skin. Arousal dominated his senses, so he forced the sexual thoughts away, determined to find out what was wrong with Rose. She finally sat up on the couch, and, with a little difficulty, he sat on the couch beside her and she soon rested her head in the crook of his chest, and he held her in his arms, closing his eyes. They both breathed deeply, relishing the smell and feel of one another’s bodies, relaxing, experiencing a vivid feeling of relief, realizing that they were together again.

Jack kissed Rose again, thoughts of the kiss they’d shared on the deck of the Titanic crashed through his mind, making him giddy. He recalled showing her the ocean, sharing a piece of himself with her. He finally ended the kiss, their foreheads touching. Stroking her back, he realized they needed to talk. “Rose, what’s the matter?”

Her mesmerizing eyes blinked, and he longed to kiss her again, but, he put a damper on his desire, realizing he needed to get to the bottom of Rose’s plight. “What do you mean, Jack?”

“You don’t look well.” He fanned his hand over her stomach stroking her abdomen, amazed that he could love a woman as much as he loved Rose. If she was sick, he needed to figure out what was wrong with her and help her to get well. “Something is wrong with you and I need to know what it is.”

Gasping, her lush mouth dropped open. Taking her index finger, she stroked his cheek. “Well, what’s wrong with you? Why are you on crutches and why do you have this bad scar on your cheek? Why did you grow a beard?”

Jack winced, realizing Rose was throwing the same questions right back at him. Continuing to cradle Rose in his arms, he told her everything that had happened to him after they’d gone their separate ways. Careful not to leave out any details, it took a long time to tell of his experience. Jack found himself caressing Rose’s stomach, sensing his gentle touch soothed her. At one point, Geri came into the sitting room, bearing a tray of coffee and bread with butter. Rose and Jack ate their snack, while Jack continued to speak. He ended by telling of his showing up at the door of the rooming house. Darkness had descended once he was done, and he kissed Rose again, yet again becoming aroused. “I wish I could love you, really love you the way that I want to.” His body rushing with desire, he abruptly pulled away, taking a deep breath.

“I love you too, Jack. I want you to make love to me.”

“We can’t,” he growled.

“I know, not here.”

He shook his head, rushing fingers through his hair, frustrated. “I can’t make love to you.”

Her pretty green eyes widened. “What?”

“I can’t make love to you again, not until we get married. That’s the way the Lord wants us to do it.”

He breathed with relief when she nodded, her red hair spilling into her face. He pushed her hair away, pressing his lips against her wonderful cheek. “I’ve spent all this time talking, and you still haven’t told me what’s wrong with you. Rose, you look like you’ve been sick.”

“Oh, Jack, I…so much has happened. I’m still worried about The Heart Of The Ocean. I thought Cal had gotten you falsely arrested.”

Staring into her eyes, he stroked her face, kissing her cheek. “We do need to figure out what to do about Cal’s necklace,” he mumbled. “But, right now, I’m more worried about you. Have you been sick?”

“Jack, I—”

Geri came into the room. “Jack, you’ll have to leave now. Mrs. Roker doesn’t allow her boarders to have male visitors after eight o’clock.” She paused for a minute. “Plus your friend, Pastor Michael, is waiting in the kitchen to take you home. He arrived a couple of hours ago and I convinced him to give you and Rose more time together. I think he’s ready to leave now.”

Jack nodded and Geri exited the room. Jack’s lips locked with Rose’s and he kissed her deeply. “I promise to come back tomorrow so that we can finish talking, okay?”

Rose nodded.

Jack continued to speak. “You look tired. I think you need to go to bed and rest.”

Rose nodded again.

He smiled, still amazed that he’d found her! “What’s wrong, Rose?”

 “I feel like I’m dreaming. I’m scared that I’ll wake up in a few minutes and find out this has all been a dream.”

 “Honey, this isn’t a dream. I’m here.” They shared another kiss. “Do you trust me?”

 “I trust you.”

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As soon as Jack had taken his exit, I dropped onto the couch, exhausted. The slam of the front door reverberated throughout the house. Geri entered the sitting room, her shawl draped around her shoulders. I blinked, looking up at her, suddenly realizing how late it was. “It’s after eight o’clock and you’re still here. Why didn’t you leave after you’d served dinner?” I’d gotten so caught up in my emotional conversation with Jack that I’d forgotten all about dinner.

 “I decided to stay late today to make sure you were okay. Did you get a chance to tell Jack about your condition?”

 I shook my head, yawning. “He told me where he’s been. Did you see the scar on his face? He got beaten up pretty badly and he also had a broken leg, plus memory loss.” I stood up, wondering where I’d find the energy to make it up the stairs to my room. “Geri, I’ll give you more details about it tomorrow. I’m just so tired right now that I feel like I’m going to pass out.”

 Geri placed her hand on my shoulder, her brow furrowed with worry. “Are you hungry? I’m getting ready to leave right now, but I saved you some dinner if you want it? I can re-heat it for you if you’d like.”

 I shook my head. “No, I can’t eat right now.” I took a deep breath, still digesting the fact that Jack had actually returned! “Geri, we prayed about this and now it looks like the Lord answered our prayers.” I glanced at the couch where Jack and I had been sitting. “I just wish that he didn’t have to leave.”

 “Humph. I saw you two kissing. You two looked pretty intense. Maybe it’s best that he left.”

 “But I missed him so much. It’s hard for me to see him leave like that.” A horrid thought crossed my mind and I frowned.

 Geri patted my shoulder. “Lily, what’s wrong? You look like you’re going to cry.”

 I sighed. “Jack is supposed to be coming back tomorrow. What if he doesn’t show up?”

 “Oh, hush. You’re just emotional right now because of your condition. Go on upstairs and go to sleep and I’ll see you in the morning.”

 After Geri left, I trudged up the stairs, barely able to keep my eyes open. I opened the door to my bedroom. Miranda was sitting in her bed, munching on popcorn and reading a book. She beamed at me as soon as I walked into the room. “Now I see why you had your dander up so much about Jack. He’s a striking-looking man. Where’s he been? Why was his leg all banged up?”

 I yawned, changing into my nightgown. I had to go to the privy and wondered if I still had enough energy to brush my teeth. “It’s a long story, and I’m too tired to tell you right now.” I blinked, tears of happiness and fatigue rushing from my eyes.

I wiped the moisture away and hurried from the room before Miranda could question me any further. After I’d used the privy and brushed my teeth, I stepped out into the hallway and saw Cecile standing in the shadows, staring at me. I glared at her, rushing away to my room. I shook my head. That woman unnerved me. *What, exactly, was her problem?*

 I returned to my room amidst the scent of Miranda’s popcorn. She dumped a few kernels into her mouth, eyeing me while I slipped into bed. “So, what’s up with Jack?”

 I sighed. “I told you, I’m too tired to talk about it now.”

 “Oh, alright.” She sounded hurt, so, I figured I needed to appease her somehow. After all, she had listened to me lament about Jack’s “abandonment” a few times.

 “Look Miranda, Jack was on crutches because he got beat up.”

 She gasped, dropping her book, her eyes widening. “Is that why he’s got that scar on his face and he’s on crutches?”

 I nodded. “He had a partial memory loss and he forgot where the rooming house was. I’d told him the address one time, but, after he was beaten up, he was unconscious for a while. It took him a few days to remember everything.” Taking a deep breath, I rolled over, facing the wall. “Now, I’m going to sleep. It’s been an emotionally taxing day.” Breathing deeply, I rubbed my stomach, fondly recalling Jack’s fingers splayed against abdomen. He’d unknowingly rubbed the spot where our baby could be growing. If I was really pregnant, and I suspected that I was, then I wondered if I was carrying a boy or a girl? As I drifted off to sleep, still rubbing my stomach, I wondered how Jack would react tomorrow when I told him that I was probably pregnant with his child.

**Chapter 14**

 Opening my closet, I studied the meager number of dresses that I owned. Upset, I dropped onto my bed, still staring at my awful wardrobe. Fisting my bedspread in my nervous hands, I recalled my dumb mom dragging me to the seamstress countless times to get measured for new dresses. I remembered wearing my fancy clothing made with silk, lace, and other fine material when I attended those awful formal dances. Most of the people I’d encountered had been un-interesting, boring, and self-centered. All the women wanted to talk about was fashion and gossip. The men always gathered on their own to talk about business.

 Shuddering, I realized I didn’t miss the fancy formal events with the shallow attendees. However, I missed my fine, expensive clothes. Jack would be arriving sometime today and I had to look my best. With much longing, I wished I still had my light-orange-colored dress with the fetching brown mid-piece. Standing, I walked to the mirror, gazing at my face. My cheeks had a bit of color and the dark circles beneath my eyes were disappearing. I pushed my fingers through my tangled mass of fiery red hair. How I wished I had a personal maid to help me with my hair! *Lord, I look a mess!*

 Plopping back onto the bed, I finally decided that I had to make the best of things. If I ever found the courage to tell Jack about my pregnancy, I didn’t want him to get angry. Closing my eyes, I recalled the short span of time I’d been on the Titanic. I’d only known Jack for a few days, and during that time, he’d mostly been happy, carefree, joyous. On the Carpathia, he’d tried to protect me from the wrath of Cal, but, Jack had been ill in the infirmary, too ill to do much damage to Cal. How would Jack react when I told him about the baby? Would he hate me? *Would he abandon me?* Again, I thought about our time we’d spent together yesterday. Jack reminded me that I needed to trust him. Closing my eyes, I rubbed my stomach. “Oh Jack,” I murmured to myself, trying to calm my nerves. “I wish I could trust you. But, I don’t know what you will say when you find out about our baby,” I whispered to myself.

Taking my time, I used the privy, took a bath, and used some of my rose-scented water as well as the fragrant lotion that the Unsinkable Molly Brown had provided for me. After donning my drab, dark brown dress, I brushed my hair until it shined. I then fixed my tresses into a fashionable bun. Pinching my cheeks to give them some color, I then eyed my reflection in the mirror.

 Breathing a sigh of relief, a thread of joy spread throughout my wounded soul. *I don’t look too bad.* Searching through my belongings, I managed to find some lipstick. After placing the fiery red paint on my full lips, I glanced at myself again, pleased.

 A knock sounded from downstairs. I wondered if it was Jack. Excited, I hurried down the stairs, anxious to see my beloved!

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 Just like yesterday, Jack knocked on the door of the rooming house. When the dark wooden door eased open, his heart almost stopped. Mesmerized, he stared at Rose, speechless. Her creamy pale skin had a bit of color and her lush red lips parted. Her vivid red hair was pulled back into a bun and her emerald green eyes held a twinge of…apprehension? Jack realized that Rose had never confided to him yesterday. Unable to resist, he caressed her cheek, and she leaned into his hand, as if she welcomed his touch.

 “Hi,” she greeted, her lovely voice shaky.

 “Hi.” Jack leaned toward her, and his mouth joined with hers. He deepened his kiss, massaging her neck with his fingers. Reluctantly, he ended the kiss, feeling off-balance and aroused. “I love you, Rose.”

 She blinked, as if taken aback by his comment. “I love you, too, Jack.”

 “You never got a chance to tell me what was wrong yesterday.” He eyed her entire body before focusing on her jade green eyes. “You’re upset about something and I want to know what’s wrong.”

 She nodded. “Okay. We need to talk. We can use the sitting room—”

 “No.” Jack shook his head, not giving her a chance to finish. “There’s a nice restaurant that’s not too far from here. We can go there for lunch.”

 She raised her vivid red eyebrows, clearly surprised. “But, I don’t think you should spend your money—”

 “Don’t worry about that. The owner of the restaurant knows Pastor Michael and owes him a favor. Pastor Michael made arrangements for us to eat lunch there.” Jack didn’t know if he’d be strong enough to keep his hands off Rose in the sitting room. He needed to spend some time with her in a public place, so a lunch date seemed like a good idea. “So, let’s get going.”

 “Hold on. I need to get my purse. Come in for a minute.” He hobbled into the foyer and Rose eased the door shut. “I’ll be right back.”

 Jack stood in the foyer, hearing light footsteps coming down the stairs. Wondering who was coming, he looked and spotted Cecile, the thin, ghost-like woman from yesterday, openly staring at him with her ice-blue eyes while she came down the steps. Why was she wearing a nightgown in the middle of the day? Was she sick? Fear and apprehension coursed through him while Cecile openly stared at him. *Lord, why does this woman give me a bad feeling?* He nodded toward her, speaking. “Hello.” Jack greeted the woman slowly, as if she were dim-witted. Perhaps she had mental problems or maybe she didn’t speak English?

 The skinny, beautiful woman shook her head, as if she didn’t understand him. Perhaps Cecile was deaf? He cocked his head, returning her stare, wondering about the nature of her problem. Another shiver of fear passed through his body, and he blinked, gripping the handles of his crutches. He shook his head, trying to figure out what he was feeling. The woman broke her stare, glancing up the steps, as if making a decision about something.

 Rose hurried down the steps, stopping to glare at Cecile. “Why are you just standing there, staring?”

Rose’s lovely voice tinged with annoyance, and all Jack wanted to do was leave. “Come on, Rose. Let’s get going.”

Rose joined him at the door and opened it. Glancing back, Jack realized Cecile still stood on the stairs, openly staring at them. Taking his time, he took the steps one at a time, using his crutches, being careful not to fall. Once they were out on the sidewalk a few cars drove by, and some horse-drawn carts clopped down the street. Jack blocked out the city sounds, focusing on Rose. Irritation furrowed her brow, and he figured she was still upset about Cecile’s weird behavior. “Where are we eating?” She looked up and down the street, as if searching for somebody.

Jack furrowed his brow, sensing Rose was not telling him something. Continuing down the street, he told her about the place. “It’s called Roman’s and it’s on the next block.”

Her beautiful face eased into a smile. “Oh, good.”

Puzzled, Jack remained silent, figuring he could get to the bottom of Rose’s problems once they were at the restaurant. Once they arrived, Rose opened the restaurant door and he hobbled in, Rose right behind him. A mustached man appeared, offering his hand. “You must be Jack. Pastor Michael said you’d be coming. It was easy to tell who you were since you’re using those crutches.” Jack shook the man’s hand, introducing Rose. “This is…Ro—Lily. This is Lily Jackson.”

He nodded at Rose. “Great. Come on back. I have a private table all ready for you.” The scent of seafood, potatoes, and bread filled the air, making Jack’s mouth water. After they’d been seated, Jack rolled a cigarette and lit it. He puffed on the smoke, and Rose turned away, placing her hand over her mouth.

“Rose, what’s wrong?”

She waved at the smoke, her face flushing. “The smoke…”

“The smoke from the cigarette bothers you?” She nodded, and he sensed that it difficult for her to tell him this. He extinguished the cigarette, staring at Rose. Something was different about her…he couldn’t quite figure out what it was. The waiter appeared, and anxious, Jack didn’t care what they ate, he just needed to get to the bottom of Rose’s problems. They really needed to talk! “Would you like to eat some fish?”

Scrunching her nose, Rose shook her head. She glanced at the waiter. “Do you have any vegetable soup and some bread?”

The waiter nodded. Jack ordered a seafood platter. Patiently, they waited for their food, silent. Jack had so many questions for Rose that he didn’t know where to start. Once their food had been served, he took her hand, bowed his head. “Lord, thank you for bringing Rose back into my life. I love her. I missed her. Please help her to confide to me today. Amen.” He squeezed her hand before he ate his food. They enjoyed their food in silence. Once Jack had scraped the last amount of food from his plate, he dropped his spoon, noticing that Rose had only eaten half of her soup and only one piece of bread. “You’re not hungry?” Concerned, he touched her face, hoping she wasn’t ill.

Rose pushed the soup away, her eyes sad. “My appetite has been weird since I’ve been at the rooming house.”

“Why? Are you sick?”

She shook her head, refusing to look into his eyes. Taking her chin, he forced her face toward his, staring into the depths of her emerald green eyes. “Something is wrong with you. I want to know what it is.” He made sure his voice was firm, hoping she wouldn’t argue with him. She remained silent while tears rushed to her eyes, sliding down her cheeks. “Ah, Rose.” He pulled her to his chest, kissing her salty tears away. Taking a napkin, he dabbed her cheeks, hoping to make her feel better.

She sniffed. “I haven’t been the same since we landed in New York, Jack.”

“I know, it’s been rough. But we’re going to get through this together, okay?”

She nodded.

Jack waited for her to explain her strange mood, but, when she remained silent, he figured he needed to give her some time to voice her thoughts. “How have things been at the rooming house? Geri seems like she’s nice. Do you get along with Miranda?”

“Miranda is okay. She’s a bit nosy, but, she’s not a bad person.”

“Why does Cecile sneak and lurk around, staring at people?”

Rose scoffed, and it appeared that she’d momentarily forgotten her sadness. “I don’t know. She barely speaks. She just walks around staring at people. It’s weird.”

“Is she sick in her head?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know but it wouldn’t surprise me if she were sick in her head. She gives me a bad feeling.”

Taking a deep breath, he realized he needed to be honest with Rose. “Remember when we were on the deck of the Titanic and I showed you my drawings for the first time?”

Encouragement filled his soul when Rose took his hand into hers, caressing his fingers. “Yes, I remember. I told you that you see people. It’s rare to have that kind of gift.”

“Well, I’m worried about you being in that rooming house.”

She frowned. “Why?”

“I don’t like what I sense in Cecile. Something is not right with her. I think she’s dangerous.”

“Jack, I’m not sure if she’s dangerous. I think she’s just odd…weird, unsettling.”

Jack shook his head, making sure Rose understood him. “Well, you need to stay away from her. Don’t talk to her or deal with her. Understand?”

Rose finally nodded, and he sighed with relief, glad she’d agreed to take his advice. Since Rose’s mood seemed to improve over the last few minutes, Jack decided that he should ask her about what’s been on her mind. He stroked her cheek, kissed her nose, before he broached the subject. “So, what’s been on your mind lately, Rose? Tell me everything that’s happened to you since we parted ways and you went to the boarding house.”

Holding her body in his arms, she rested her head in the crook of his elbow. He stroked her stomach, staring at the cream-colored walls of the restaurant. Since they were in a secluded corner, most of the diners could not observe them. He closed his eyes, relishing the sound of Rose’s sweet voice as she told of going to the rooming house, sharing a room with Miranda, and her friendship with Geri. “Jack, Geri’s taught me so much about God and prayer.” She then told about how Cecile made her feel unsettled. Then, she paused, staring at her half-filled soup bowl. Taking a deep breath, she continued to tell of her time since they’d parted after the Carpathia had docked. “My appetite has been weird. My sense of smell has been weird, Jack.”

He frowned, not understanding. “What do you mean?”

She mentioned how coffee smelled like dirt, and sometimes, the scents of different things made her sick. Then, in a rushed voice, she told about running into her mom at the coffee house. “That’s why I’d asked you earlier where we were eating. I didn’t want to go to the same place where I’d seen my mother drinking coffee. I also didn’t want to run into my mother on the street, either.” She then paused, taking several deep breaths.

He softened his voice, sitting up straighter, forcing her to look into his eyes. “Rose, what’s wrong?”

“Jack, my mother told me that she thinks I’m pregnant.” She blinked a few times, tears again spilling down her cheeks. “Jack, I think I’m pregnant with your baby.”

Jack’s strong euphoric feeling of love crashed and disappeared like the waves upon a beach. He blinked, wondering if he’d heard her correctly. “Rose, are you sure? This is crazy!”

Continuing to cry, Rose sniffed. “Jack, I’ve been sick because I’m pregnant.”

Still stunned, Jack couldn’t even find the energy to comfort Rose. All he could manage to do was stare at the cream-colored walls, wondering how on earth he’d ever mange to take care of a baby. The waiter arrived, looking confused when he spotted Jack cradling Rose, who continued to blubber. “Hey, could you bring me some brandy over ice? I think we’re going to be sitting here for a long time.”

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Private Investigator Lymen Smith poured the peach brandy into his glass before taking a deep drag from his cigarette. He stared around his office, glad that he’d solved another mystery and now it was time for celebration. He’d allowed his secretary to go home early since he’d been in such a good mood. With the large sum of money he’d just earned, he might consider hiring an assistant to help him solve cases.

He took a swig of brandy, enjoying the rich cool burning sensation as the alcohol traveled down his throat. The sudden knock at the door surprised him so much that he dropped his cigarette. Grumbling, he figured his secretary had forgotten to place the closed sign on the front door. “Come in,” he barked, exasperated that his little celebration had been interrupted.

A well-dressed man entered, his dark hair slicked back. Lymen eyed the man from head to toe, realizing he probably had a lot of money…a blue blood definitely. He hid his drink behind the file cabinet, not wanting this man to see him celebrating. If his instincts were correct, he sensed that this man’s visit could turn into another high-paying case.

“Are you Private Investigator Lymen Smith?”

Lymen nodded, gesturing toward a chair. “Yes, I am. How can I help you?”

The man sat in a chair, and for the first time, Lymen realized he carried a leather case. He opened the case, removing the contents. “I have to find this woman. She may be a thief. She may be in possession of a necklace that’s worth thousands of dollars.” He presented the photo and Lymen resisted the urge to whistle. This woman was beautiful!

Lymen spoke. “I’ll need more details. After that I can quote you a price and then if you agree, I can start the investigation.”

The gentleman flicked his hand into the air, as if money was not an issue. “I don’t care about the price, just FIND HER!”

Lymen jerked back into his seat, shocked at the man’s abrasive tone. “Before we start discussing this case, I’ll need to get your name.”

“My name’s Hockley, Cal Hockley.”

**Chapter 15**

 *“Daddy!” Dropping his sketching pencil, Jack scooped up the chubby red-haired toddler, bringing his lips to her soft cheek.*

 *Hugging the child, he closed his eyes. “I love you,” he breathed. Opening his eyes, he suddenly realized his arms were empty. Upset, he ransacked the small apartment, searching for the child. Where was his little girl?*

*“Jack!” Rose appeared in front of his face, halting his search. Her skeletal arms flailed, tears coursing down her sunken cheeks. “Where’s the baby?” She caressed her swollen stomach with bony fingers…another baby was on the way! They had to find the missing child before the next baby came. Rose followed him into their bedroom, searching for their child.*

*While looking beneath piles of tattered clothes, thinking their baby was hiding beneath the clothing, Jack spoke. “What happened to you? You need to eat more food to take care of the baby.”*

*“Jack, you haven’t gotten paid in weeks! I’m starving! We have no food!”*

*Jack stopped, spotting his daughter amidst the clothes. No longer chubby, her skeletal body hovered under the garments, her green eyes laced with sadness, her full lips now blue. “Daddy, I’m cold! Help me!”*

Screaming, Jack awakened, struggling to open his eyes. Feeling a mini-explosion in his skull, he groaned, fisting his hair, wishing the pain would go away. *Lord, please make this pain stop.*

 Pastor Michael’s voice echoed in the room. “Jack, it’s about time you woke up.”

 “Pastor, you think I should make him some tea?” asked Thelma.

 “Thelma, I think in a case like this, coffee would be better. Make it black and strong.”

 “Okay, I’ll be back with the coffee in a few minutes.”

 Groaning again, Jack rolled over in the bed, forcing his eyes open, staring at the familiar walls in the spare bedroom at the pastor’s home. “Oh, Pastor Michael, what’s wrong with me?”

 “You don’t remember?”

 Jack glanced at Pastor Michael, realizing the clergyman was dressed in his day clothes, and he also noticed that bright sunlight spilled into the room. “What time is it?” His voice croaked, and he realized his throat felt dry, like a desert.

 “It’s noon. Me, Thelma and Paul were about to eat lunch when you woke up.”

 As if on cue, Paul popped his head into the doorway. “Hey, Jack, I see you’re awake.”

 Jack nodded toward the tall lumberjack, recalling what Thelma had told him about her relationship with Paul. He wondered how Paul would react if Thelma got pregnant *before* they got married. “I wish I could go back to sleep, my head hurts.”

 “You really don’t remember what happened yesterday?” asked Pastor Michael again.

 Sighing, Jack struggled to think. He recalled sitting in the restaurant with Rose, eating their meal, then she’d told him her news. He’d been too upset to comfort her. The vision of Rose, bawling in the restaurant, sliced through him like a knife. He had to go back to her! “I’ve gotta talk to Rose.” He pushed the blanket off the bed, but the room swayed when he stood. He dropped back onto the bed, groaning again. “What am I going to do?” he muttered.

 Paul dropped into the empty chair beside the pastor, observing Jack. “Why’d you get so drunk?”

 Jack frowned, looking at Paul as if he were crazy. “Drunk? Did I drink that much?” He remembered being upset and ordering some brandy, but, his memories turned fuzzy after that.

 Thelma entered the room, carrying a mug of hot coffee. The fragrant smelled tugged at Jack’s senses, and he accepted the cup, taking a small sip, before setting the cup on the windowsill.

 Pastor Michael spoke. “Thelma and Paul, I need to speak to Jack alone.”

 Both Thelma and Paul left the room, closing the door behind them. Jack took another sip of coffee, sensing the pastor was about to give him a lecture. Jack wasn’t in the mood for lectures. He just needed to get to Rose. He figured she’d be upset that he’d ignored her after her news yesterday. Jack winced, wondering what he was going to do. How in the world was he going to take care of a baby when he could barely take care of himself?

 “So, why were you screaming when you woke up?”

 Jack fingered the coffee cup, trying to gather his thoughts. His head felt unreal, as if webs of cotton were stuffed into his brain. “I had a nightmare. A bad one.”

 “Another nightmare about the Titanic sinking?”

 Jack shook his head. “No, not that.”

 When Jack remained silent, the pastor asked another question. “So, Jack, what happened when you went to lunch yesterday with Rose? When I finally came to get you, you’d been drinking for several hours and Rose looked awful.”

 “You came to get me?”

 The pastor nodded. “Yes, when you started drinking, Rose said she’d tried to get you to stop, but you kept ordering more drinks. Since the restaurant owner is a friend of mine, she talked to him, convincing him to find me to come and get you. I couldn’t get there until late in the evening, and Rose had to get back to the boarding house before her curfew. The girl looked upset. I could tell she’d been crying, but, when I asked her what happened, she wouldn’t tell me. I made sure she got back to the rooming house safely before you and I came back here.”

 Jack sighed, taking another sip of coffee. “Thanks for taking her back to the rooming house. Once I had that first brandy, I guess I just couldn’t stop drinking.”

 “But, why did you start drinking in the first place? Why’d you get drunk? Since I’ve known you, you don’t seem to be prone to much drinking.”

 Jack glanced around the room, wondering what the pastor would do when he found out the truth about him and Rose. Would the pastor would throw him out of his home once he found out the truth? He then glanced at Pastor Michael. The pastor gazed at Jack with his kind brown eyes, and Jack sensed that all that the pastor wanted to do was help him.

 Taking a deep breath, Jack finally told the news. “Rose is pregnant.”

 The pastor’s eyes widened for a few seconds, and Jack sensed that he’d shocked him. He blinked a few times as if he had to gather his thoughts before speaking. “Well, at least I now understand why you felt you had to get yourself drunk yesterday.”

 There was no condemnation in the pastor’s tone, so, Jack mentally sighed with relief. “So much has happened over the last two weeks. Who would’ve thought that winning that Titanic ticket when I was in Paris would change my life forever?”

 “Did drinking all that brandy cause you to have a nightmare?”

 Jack shook his head, causing waves of pain to shoot through his skull. Groaning, he closed his eyes for a few minutes before speaking. In a roughened voice, he told about his nightmare. He then asked Michael a question. “What if Rose and our daughter die because I can’t take care of them?” Apprehension coursed through him. “What if I die?”

 Pastor Michael’s eyes softened with sadness while he pushed his chair closer to Jack’s bed, patting his shoulder. “Son, you need to calm down. You won’t die. I’m pretty sure that you, Rose and the baby will be fine. I think the sinking of the ship and all the nightmares you’ve been having about the Titanic sinking is affecting you.” He shuddered. “I can’t imagine what it would do to somebody, seeing so many people die in that cold water. Jack, you’re mentally suffering right now, but, with the Lord’s help, it’ll be okay.”

 Jack sighed, downtrodden. “I hope you’re right.”

 Pastor Michael leaned back into the wooden chair, getting comfortable. “You know, I’m curious about something.”

 “What’s that?”

 “You just said you were worried about Rose and your daughter dying?” Wincing, Jack nodded, still plagued by the awful dream. “Well, you speak as if you’re sure Rose is having a girl. Did you say you were worried about your daughter dying because the baby in your dream was a girl?”

 Jack shook his head, again wincing at the pain. His hands shook slightly, so, he took his time taking another sip of coffee from the thick white mug. The slightly bitter taste of the black coffee traveled down this throat, giving him a shred of comfort. “No, that’s not why I said that. I just know that Rose is having a girl.”

 Pastor Michael’s brow furrowed with confusion. “But *how* do you know?”

 Jack shrugged. “I just know. I can’t explain it.” Taking his time, he tried to explain his ability to see people. “I see people, Pastor. Sometimes, I can just tell how people will turn out, what’ll happen in their future. Things like that. When I was dying, I told Rose that she’d have lots of babies, I just didn’t realize they’d be mine.” Pausing, he recalled their time together in the frigid water. “I also know she’s going to die an old lady, warm in her bed.”

 Chuckling, the sadness left the pastor’s eyes. “Well, if you know that Rose is having lots of babies, then I doubt you have to worry about her dying or the baby dying. That’s just fear, and the Lord despises fear.”

Jack nodded, realizing the pastor was right. He was allowing fear to dominate his mind, opening him up to nightmares. *Lord, take this fear away from me.*

Michael spoke again. “If you can see things, then, you’re a prophet, Jack.”

 “Huh?”

 “The Lord blesses some of His children with the gift of prophecy. You have that gift. Do you always tell others what you see?”

Jack shrugged. “Sometimes, but, sometimes, I try and let people know what I see through my drawings.”

 “Ah.” The pastor nodded as if he understood perfectly.

 “I know Thelma and Paul will be happy together. They’re going to get married and have babies. They love each other.”

 Chuckling, Michael patted Jack’s shoulder. “Just as you love Rose?”

 He nodded. “I love her, but, I’m just shocked.”

 “Well, Jack, what are you going to do now?”

 Jack dropped back onto the pillows. *What was he going to do now?* He didn’t have an easy answer for the pastor as he hoped and prayed this gargantuan headache disappeared.

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 Taking my time, I left the rooming house, eager to walk. Tired this morning, I had not had the energy to join the rest of my housemates for breakfast. While in my bed, I’d been so sad and depressed that I didn’t know what to do with myself. I didn’t even feel like confiding to Geri. All she’d want me to do was pray and right now, I didn’t think that God would listen to me.

Now that it was afternoon, my energy had returned and I had a mission to accomplish. While walking the crowded streets of New York, I caressed my stomach, visions of Jack’s reaction to my pregnancy haunting me. I’d been awake all night, thoughts of drunken Jack invading my sleep.

*I can’t believe that Jack got drunk.*

Since I’d told him the news, I’d been re-thinking my future, the future of me and my baby. Jack had said that I could trust him, but, now I wasn’t too sure about that. What if he really did abandon me and the baby? He didn’t say much of anything after I’d told him about the baby. Did that mean he was having second thoughts about our relationship?

Frustrated, I continued walking, knowing that I only had a few more months at the rooming house before I’d be put out on the street, forced to make a living for myself. I didn’t know how to do anything. Yes, Geri could teach me how to cook and clean the house, and then I could use those skills to find a job to take care of myself and the baby. However, there was no guarantee that I’d be able to find a job.

There was no guarantee that I’d even be very good at cooking and cleaning the house.

In a few months, if Jack refused to accept me and our unborn child into his life, I’d be on my own, and right now, the only person that I knew who could make a living was my mother. Would I be forced to live with her above the seamstress shop? Would the shop owner let me live there?

I stopped walking, sickened at the thought of living with my mom. However, I had the baby to think about. Shaking my head, I continued walking, colliding into another person. “Hey, watch it!” A woman glared at me, continuing down the street.

“Sorry,” I muttered. However, I doubted she heard me. I shook my head, realizing that I needed to pay better attention while walking. After strolling for a long time, I finally stopped outside the coffee house where I’d seen my mother days ago. My mom sat at a table, holding a mug of coffee in her hands. She spotted me, and her eyes widened. I rushed into the coffee house. I didn’t care if my mom didn’t want to see me. I had to talk to her.

I entered the plush establishment, making my way to my mother’s table. I finally sat, taking a deep breath. Before I could speak, my mother said something. “I was just about to leave.”

I gritted my teeth, caressing my belly, determined to do what I had to do to survive. Telling Jack about my condition yesterday gave me courage. My mother deserved to know that her suspicions were probably correct. “I think I am pregnant with Jack’s baby. I believe you were right.” Another thing that had crossed my mind recently, my cycle was supposed to start a couple of days ago. My cycle is like clockwork, I’m NEVER late. Coupled with my other symptoms, I figured I was pregnant.

She raised her eyebrows. “So, why did you come here looking for me?”

Was she serious? Didn’t she know why I came? “I need to figure out what I’m going to do.”

My mother actually chuckled. The sound made me sick to my stomach. “I hope you’re not asking *me* to help you.”

My mouth dropped open while I stared at my dumb mom. It had been days since I’d seen her and since that time, she looked even worse. Her cheeks appeared more hollow and her eyes were ringed with dark circles. She wore the same dress that she’d been wearing the last time I’d seen her and it draped loosely on her gaunt frame. “You would turn your back on me, while I’m pregnant with your grandchild?”

Narrowing her eyes, she leaned toward me. “I’m turning my back on you the way you turned your back on me,” she hissed. She shook so badly that she had to put her coffee cup back into her saucer. Continuing to glare at me, she spoke her mind. “We’re in this situation because you’re nothing more than a whore.”

I jerked back as if I’d been slapped, too stunned to speak. A waiter walked by our table, and I was glad that he didn’t stop to refill her coffee cup. She pointed her finger at me. “*You* were supposed to marry Cal, but, you had to sleep with that vagabond like some common prostitute and then you got yourself pregnant.” She stood, continuing to shake with anger as she came to stand right in front of me. She spotted me rubbing my stomach. Taking my hand, she pushed it off my belly, glaring at my abdomen. “That *thing* growing inside of you has absolutely nothing to do with me. Until you can come up with a plan to put us back into the society where we rightfully belong, I never want to see you again!” She continued to shake, and I wondered if she were going to faint again. Her pale skin turned red as a tomato, and she was so angry that spittle ran down the side of her mouth.

She grabbed my wrist in her bony fingers, squeezing tight, bringing her face close to mine. The spittle now ran down her scrawny neck, making her look like a hungry, emaciated witch. Her emerald eyes carried a wild, hollow, look, and I truly wondered if my stupid mom should be locked up in a mental house. She looked utterly crazy right now and I sensed I needed to get away from her.

“Ouch, you’re hurting my wrist.” I groaned, feeling dizzy and light-headed, realizing that I had not eaten yet that day. My stomach churned, and I wondered if I was going to puke.

The slap that collided to my cheek made my head jerk back, causing a wave of pain over my skin. I squealed, shocked that my mom hit my face. Her face was so close to mine, that I caught a faint whiff of her perfume. “I told you not to see that boy again. If you had heeded my advice, you would not be pregnant right now.” Glaring at my stomach, she continued to speak. “You are no longer my daughter. To me, you’re nothing but a dead woman.”

I gasped, standing, recalling the fire that Jack said burned within me. There was no way I’d let my mother treat me like this. “I’ll never come back to see you again, but, let me ask you something. What if dad were alive? What do you think he’d say about you treating me like this?” Standing up straighter, I continued to speak my mind. “Being with Cal would’ve killed me. Cal didn’t *love* me!”

“Love? What do you know about love?”

I got right into my mother’s face, refusing to be intimidated. “Well, what do *you* know about love? The only person you’ve ever loved is yourself. Now, let go of my wrist.”

She slapped me again and I stomped on her foot. Howling, she lost her balance, falling back onto the table of some other patrons. Their hot coffee sloshed onto my mom’s flushed face, making her scream. Her eyes no longer looked hollow and crazy, and it appeared her sanity returned when she noticed the brown liquid seeping onto her skin and she realized the rest of the patrons gawked at both of us. A haggard, chunky, dark-haired man appeared, pulling my crazy mother off the table. “Ruth, our deal is off. I can’t let you come in here disturbing my patrons, even if you do give me a discount on my daughters’ dress alterations. You need to go someplace else for free coffee.”

Disgusted with my mom, I ran out of the coffeehouse, realizing all of the customers were now staring at me. I ran down the sidewalk, not caring if I bumped into people. My hard shoes clonked against the sidewalk while I continued to run, tears streaming down my cheeks. I turned left, right, any which way. I had no idea how long or how far I’d run, I just knew I had to keep moving or I’d go crazy. When I was finally out of breath, I realized I was lost. Tears continued to course down my cheeks and several people stared at me, probably thinking I was a lunatic.

I stopped in front of an abandoned shop window, staring at my reflection. A red mark marred my cheek where my mom had slapped me. I then glanced down at my wrist, noting that it was bruised too. Going into an abandoned alley, I saw a few rats and some trash strewn on the dirty ground. I dropped onto the ground, too weary to keep going. Tears coursed down my cheeks as I realized I was now, truly, alone.

*Just like Jack, I was now an orphan. As far as I was concerned, both of my parents were now dead.*

**Chapter 16**

*“You will honor and obey ME!” Cal grabbed a fistful of Rose’s hair, pulling her tresses until she screamed. “You little whore.” He slapped her face and she bit his hand and he yelped, dropping her hair. Her head jerked back, colliding against the hard white wall. “I want my necklace back!”*

*Feeling fuzzy, Jack witnessed the scene, clawing at the glass door. “Rose!” The door remained locked and he struggled to open it. He kicked, screamed, did everything in his power to rescue Rose. Then, exhausted, he fell against the glass door, still staring at the scene unfolding in front of him. Rose’s dress had been ripped and her stomach bulged, and he spotted her rounded stomach moving. The baby was trying to get out of Rose’s body!*

*A thin trickle of blood spilled from the side of Rose’s mouth. Pulling a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, Cal cuffed her hands behind her before kicking her leg. “You’ll be sorry you ever did this to me.” Cal’s dark eyes were full of hate, before he threw his head back and laughed, the evil sound echoing, in the stark white room.*

Screaming, Jack awakened, spotting the darkness outside. Checking the clock on the wall, he realized it was only four o’clock in the morning. Shaking his head, he struggled to get out of bed. Something was wrong with Rose. He had to find her!

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“What do you mean you don’t know where she is?” Jack stared at Geri, frustrated. He’d managed to borrow Pastor Michael’s horse and wagon this early Sunday morning. The Pastor had said that he’d ride to the church that morning with Thelma and Paul and that Jack needed to find Rose and talk to her.

The aromatic scent of fresh-brewed coffee filled the air and Geri set a mug of coffee on the table, looking at Jack, gesturing for him to sit down and drink the brew. Jack shook his head, refusing the drink. “I can’t drink anything right now. Where is Lily?”

Frowning, Geri dropped into the wooden chair, resting her forehead into her hands as if she had a headache. “Jack, I don’t know.” She shook her head, clearly upset. “I couldn’t sleep last night worrying over Lily. I’d just assumed she’d gone to find you.”

Jack sat beside Geri, realizing he had to make it his mission to find Rose. Patting Geri’s shoulder, he attempted to calm her down, since a few tears now slid from her dark brown eyes. “We need to stop and think about this. We need to try and figure out what’s happened to Lily.” He wanted Geri to think about every detail that she could. He glanced at the clock on the kitchen wall. It was six o’clock on Sunday morning and Rose was not at the rooming house. *Where was she?*

“You’d said that you’d assumed Lily had gone to find me? When did she leave?”

Sighing, Geri finally spoke. “She left yesterday afternoon. I believe Miranda had seen her walking down the sidewalk.”

Wincing, Jack’s blood boiled with anger. *What if Cal had somehow gotten to Rose?* Why else would she be gone – still gone after leaving the house yesterday? He eyed Geri, wondering if he could trust her if he mentioned Cal. He recalled Rose stating that she had grown close to Geri, so, he threw caution to the wind and decided to be honest with her. “Did Lily mention somebody by the name of Cal Hockley to you?”

Geri nodded. “Wasn’t that her fiancé?”

“Her *ex*-fiancé. He’s got money…lots of money and connections. I could imagine his being angry about Lily leaving him.” Jack again recalled The Heart Of The Ocean. What would they do with that necklace? He pushed the thought aside, again focusing on Rose’s plight.

Geri’s voice interrupted his thoughts. “I know we need to find her. Mrs. Roker will be highly upset if she discovers one of her boarders was out all night. Once Lily is found, she may need to explain to Mrs. Roker where she was – missing the curfew could be grounds for dismissal from the house.”

Taking a few deep breaths, Jack found himself praying. *Lord, please help me to find Rose.* “Why would she leave like that? Something’s happened to her. The only person who would do something to her would be Cal.”

Geri wiped her tears, finally looking at Jack again. “I know she didn’t like you getting drunk after finding out she was pregnant. She was highly upset about that.”

Jack stood, gathering his crutches. “Geri, I’ve been mad at myself all day yesterday. I wanted to see Rose yesterday, but I was too sick.” He hung his head, staring at the white kitchen floor, full of shame. “I was so drunk the day before that my stomach was queasy yesterday. I spent the day in bed, and now I just want to apologize to Rose and make everything better. So, you didn’t realize she was gone until this morning? I’m surprised nobody realized she was gone last night.”

“I usually get off of work by six in the evening. I know Lily wasn’t here when I left last night. I was worried about her, but, I thought she’d be back sometime yesterday evening.”

He paused, thinking. “You said Miranda saw her leave?”

Geri nodded.

“Would you mind waking her up? Maybe she can tell us which direction she went when she left. I’m going to ride around town until I find her.”

Geri stood and exited the warm kitchen, returning several minutes later with Miranda. The young woman’s sleep-tousled hair and wrinkled nightgown were evidence that she’d gotten a good night’s sleep. “Miranda, Geri said you saw Lily leave yesterday. Which way did she go?”

“She walked out the door and took a left. I saw her. She was walking really fast and she seemed worried. She’s been worried and preoccupied since you two went to lunch. I thought the two of you may have had an argument. When she didn’t come home last night, I’d just assumed she’d found you and the two of you were spending some time together. I didn’t mention her absence last night because I didn’t want her getting into trouble.”

Jack swallowed, trying to calm himself down. He had no way of knowing if Cal were in town or not. If he was, he wouldn’t be surprised if he’d somehow gotten a hold of Rose. Closing his eyes briefly, he recalled laying on the deck of the Titanic, beneath the stars, Rose running along the deck, right before she attempted to throw herself overboard. Was she so upset that she’d attempt to take her own life again? Jack shook the unwelcome thought away like unwanted garbage. Strong and compassionate Rose wouldn’t do something like that, especially since she was pregnant. But, something was wrong with her, he just knew it.

He nodded toward Miranda. “Thanks, Miranda.” He hobbled toward the kitchen door and Geri rushed to open it for him.

“Jack, where are you going?” asked Geri.

“I’m going to find Lily. I’m going to turn this city upside down until I find her.”

Determined, Jack hobbled to the waiting horse and wagon as fast as he could. After dumping his crutches into the wagon, he jumped into the vehicle, wincing when his sore leg hit the seat. He unset the brake, flicked the reins and the sandy-colored horse took off down the street. He made sure they went in the direction that Miranda had mentioned. Thoughts of the thin, ghostlike woman named Cecile flitted through his mind. Should he have asked if she’d seen Rose? A shiver of fear raced through him, and he realized asking Cecile any questions would not be a good idea.

He continued down the sleepy early Sunday morning street of New York. Traffic was light and all of the shops were closed. He recalled Rose stating that her mother had arranged to get free coffee from a coffee house in town. Had she gone to her mother yesterday? As far as he knew, Rose didn’t have any friends in New York.

Continuing to drive, the sun shined on his face, the wind rushed by as he sped through town, looking up and down the street. Then, he opened his mouth, yelling as loud as he could. “Rose! Rose!” Driving faster and faster he continued to yell her name, yelling and turning down street after street until his voice became hoarse.

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Hearing my name being called, I opened my eyes, blinking rapidly. The sun shined in the abandoned alley, and I swallowed, realizing I was thirsty. Had I actually slept in this alley all night? A rat scampered by, but, I was too emotionally upset to care about the ugly rodent. *Lord, what in the world am I going to do?* I figured hearing Jack call my name had been a part of a dream. There’s no way that Jack would be out looking for me – he had to get drunk when he found out about our baby, did he even want to see me again?

“Rose!”

Hearing my name being called again, I stood, my legs shaky like jelly. I stumbled to the end of the alley, toward the street. I blinked, thinking I was hallucinating. Jack Dawson drove by in a horse-drawn wagon, yelling my name. His distressed voice was the most beautiful sound I’d ever heard in my life. “Jack.” My voice came out hoarse, so I swallowed, took a deep breath, and belted out Jack’s name as loud as I could. “Jack!”

The wagon stopped. Jack looked back, spotting me. He got out of the wagon, wincing since he walked toward me without his crutches on his sore leg. “Rose, what happened to you?”

Unable to speak, I fell into his arms, breathing deeply. Lord, this man smelled good! I hugged him and he kissed my cheek, pushing my red hair away from my face. “Rose, what happened?” He caressed my cheek. “You have a bruise on your face.” Anger filled his handsome face and he now looked up and down the street, his hand now balled into a tight fist. “Who did this to you, Rose? Were you attacked? Do I need to call the authorities?”

Stunned and upset, I shook my head. “No, no authorities.” My voice didn’t sound like my own voice.

“Rose, who did this to you?” Jack’s voice had gotten angrier, and I knew he wanted me to answer his question.

I shook my head, feeling extremely cold, and my stomach churned. A sour taste filled my mouth and I turned toward the trashcan and vomited into the container. Jack released me while I clutched the trashcan and vomited again and again. Soon, my stomach was emptied, and the foul taste lingered in my mouth. Running my tongue over my teeth, I desperately wanted a glass of cold water and a nice warm bed.

Jack pulled me into his arms and on his wobbly gait, we made our way to the wagon. I managed to get in and he got in beside me. After flicking the reins, the horse began to trot down the street. After about fifteen minutes, we’d arrived back at the rooming house. It was about seven o’clock and Geri met us at the back door. “Lily what happened to your face?” Concern showed in her dark eyes, and I shook my head, not having the energy to explain.

Jack entered behind me, hobbling on his crutches, looking at Geri. “I think she’s in shock. Something’s happened to her and I don’t know what it is.”

Geri took charge. “Lily, why don’t you go to the privy and clean up. Did you need me to help you?”

I shook my head. I looked at Jack, noticing the worried frown on his handsome features. “Jack, can I talk to you in the sitting room?” My voice still sounded funny to my own ears. It sounded detached, as if I were speaking from far away. I shook my head, wondering what was wrong with me.

Geri stepped in. “Honey, let me take you to the privy so you can wash up. You can talk to Jack after that.”

I left Jack in the kitchen, allowing Geri to lead me to the privy. After I’d washed up, I tied my hair back into a bun, glancing at myself in the mirror. I looked hideous! My mom must’ve slapped me pretty hard for a bruise to still show on my skin. My mom…I could no longer think of her as a living, breathing person since she said I was no longer her daughter. I clutched the bathroom sink - I clutched it until my fingers ached. The pain and anguish of my mom’s words sliced through me like a red-hot knife. Tears poured down my cheeks, and I took great effort to pull myself together.

I finally left the privy, and spotted Cecile standing outside in the hallway, her nightgown billowing on her thin frame. She stared at me while I walked by, but, frankly, I didn’t even have the desire or energy to say anything to her. Why bother? She obviously didn’t want to have anything to do with the rest of us living in this house.

I walked downstairs and when I entered the sitting room, I found Jack standing by the window on his crutches, staring outside. “Jack.”

His mouth dropped open as he turned to look at me. “Close the door,” he commanded softly. I closed the door, staring into Jack’s handsome face. He gestured toward the couch. “Sit down. We need to talk.” He hobbled over to the couch and dropped his crutches on the floor before sitting. I sat beside him and he pulled me into his arms and his lips pressed against mine. We kissed long and hard, as I enjoyed the taste, smell and touch of Jack Dawson. Red hot desire swept through me when his hands massaged my belly. Abruptly, I pulled away, sitting up, spotting the tray of coffee and bread and butter that Geri had left on the table.

I said the first thing that came to my mind. “When you touch me and kiss me, it feels so good that it’s scary.”

Jack raised his eyebrows, and I could tell that my comment surprised him. “Why is it scary?”

I shrugged, trying to think how to explain it to him. “I love you so much Jack, that it hurts. Being in love with you like this, having you touch me, kiss me, getting aroused, being with you…it’s like you have this power over me. A power to hurt me like nobody else can hurt me.” What my mother had said to me had hurt, deep to my core. But, if Jack were to willingly leave me forever, I’m not sure if I could ever get over that pain. Did Jack even realize how much power he had over my emotions? Did I hold the same power over his feelings?

Jack took both of my hands into his, leaning his face toward mine, our foreheads touching. “Rose, I’ll never leave you. Remember, you jump, I jump?”

I nodded, enjoying the closeness that Jack and I shared. He finally released my hands and we ate the bread and butter. I couldn’t stand drinking the coffee, so, I had water with my simple breakfast. Once we were finished eating, Jack took me into his arms, kissed my hair. “Rose, that was so stupid what you did yesterday. What happened? Why were you out all night?” He stroked my cheek. “Who hit you?”

I sniffed, tears spilling down my cheeks.

“Ah, Rose,” Jack breathed.

In a tearful voice, I told Jack all about what had happened to me the previous day. I told him about my disappointment and sadness about his reaction to our baby. I told him about my walk down the New York City street.

I told him about my mom’s hateful words. “Jack, she thinks of me as a dead person. I’m no longer her daughter. I’m an orphan, just like you.”

Jack remained silent, but, I could tell from the strong plane of his jaw that he worked to control his anger. “Rose, you’re better off without your mother in your life. She doesn’t love you.” He paused, as if he had to gather his thoughts. “Remember on the ship when Mr. Andrews was taking you, your mom, and Cal on a tour of the ship? I borrowed a passenger’s coat and found you, snuck you to that room so that I could speak to you privately?”

I nodded, the memory crashing into my fractured mind. “Yes, I remember.”

“If you’d let Cal and your mother dominate your life, it would’ve killed you, Rose. You would’ve been miserable…I love your fire, your spirit, your courage…all of that would’ve been gone had you stayed with your mother and Cal. I know you’re hurting right now, but just trust me on this, what happened to you yesterday was a blessing in disguise.” He toyed with my fingers and kissed my palm. “I don’t want you running off anymore, endangering your life and our baby’s life. I don’t want you upset about things that I do – I love you and it was a big shock to find out that you’re carrying our baby. In spite of all that happens, you have to remember how much I love you. We’re in this together. Do you trust me?”

I blinked, finding joy and comfort in Jack’s words. I squeezed his fingers, whispering, “I trust you.”

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Cecile listened at the closed doorway of the sitting room with interest, realizing that Jack and “Lily” would be in the room for at least a few hours. Miranda had left early that Sunday morning – Cecile had overheard that Miranda would not be back for several hours. Sighing with relief, she turned to leave and almost ran into Geri. Geri’s full lips tightened into a frown while she glared at Cecile. “Why are you standing there listening to their conversation?”

Cecile cringed, unsure of what she should say. This entire house appeared to dislike how she lurked in corners and in shrouded hallways. She had a mission to accomplish, but, she couldn’t let them know about that. Geri continue to stare at Cecile, as if awaiting her response. “I’m not listening,” she managed to say before hurrying up the stairs. From the shadows of the stairs, she watched Geri return to the kitchen.

Cecile continued down the hallway, stopping at Miranda’s and “Lily’s” doorway. She gave herself a secret smile, realizing she was probably the only person in this house that realized that Lily was really named Rose. That girl had secrets and Cecile had discovered over the years when people were hiding something and you could find out what they were hiding, you could milk them for lots of money in exchange for keeping their secret.

She looked left, then right in the darkened hallway, still confident that she would not be interrupted with her mission. Turning the brass doorknob, she gasped with pleasure, realizing that the door was unlocked! Finally! She pushed the door open, rushing into the room, softly closing the door behind her. Her eyes swept the room, seeing the closet and the beds, realizing if she heard someone coming with her sharp ears, she’d be able to hide under the bed or in the closet. Her extremely thin frame folded nicely into tight spaces, and she was glad that she was able to keep such a skinny figure even though she’d been tempted often by Geri’s wonderful-smelling food. She leaned against the wall for a few seconds, feeling lightheaded. She needed to eat a bit more food today. If she went too long without eating, she’d begin to feel ill.

Once the lightheaded feeling had passed, she scanned the room, spotting a sack beneath Rose’s bed. Stepping into the room on lightened steps, she pulled the sack out, careful to observe the exact position of the sack beneath the bed. She knew from experience that if you didn’t replace personal belongings exactly as the owner left them, they would discover that someone had been messing with their things.

With quick, nimble fingers, she removed a few cheap, uninteresting items from the sack, stopping at the heavy-weighted item at the bottom. She pulled the item out, realizing it was wrapped in a cloth. Unwrapping the cloth, Cecile gasped so loud, she had to press her hand against her lips. Excitement spilled through her and her skinny body quivered with glee. “This must be worth a fortune,” she mumbled to herself. From her lurking, sneaking and listening to Jack’s and Rose’s whispered conversations, she’d heard mention of The Heart Of The Ocean necklace. *This must be it!*

Giddiness swept through her while she stroked the necklace, loving the cold feel of the blue diamond. Rose must be a thief, hiding from the law. Why else would she have had on a disguise as an old lady when she first came to this rooming house? Why would everybody else call her Lily when her boyfriend Jack called her Rose? Those two were in deep trouble - Cecile could feel it in her bones. Plus, she knew that Rose was out all night last night. Where had she been? Was she out, robbing somebody else – was she still a thief? Plus, Cecile knew from Rose’s private conversations with Geri and Jack that she was pregnant with Jack’s baby. If Mrs. Roker found out about Rose’s pregnancy, she’d throw her out of the rooming house!

Desperate, Cecile needed money. They only had a few more weeks paid to stay in the rooming house, then Cecile had to find another means of support. Feeling melancholy, she recalled her years in Paris, wishing things could’ve worked out with her lover, but, alas, they didn’t and she’d found herself on a ship, bound for home, hoping things could work out later.

She pushed the thoughts away, again focusing on the most expensive necklace that she’d ever seen in her life. Footsteps sounded in the hallway and Rose’s voice carried behind the door. “Jack, I have to lie down for a few minutes. I don’t think Mrs. Roker will mind if you come into my room as long as I leave the door open.”

Cecile’s heart rate increased while she shoved the necklace and belongings back into the tattered sack, plunging the sack back under the bed. She’d let her mind wander too much and had not realized that Jack and Rose had come up the steps. She stood, fear sweeping through her like a massive tidal wave. She spotted the darkened closet, began racing toward it when the door opened and Rose stepped in, her jade green eyes sparkling with anger. “Cecile, what are you doing in my room?!”

**Chapter 17**

Cecile opened her mouth, her hand pressing against her throbbing heart, but words escaped her. Her mind was spinning, unsure of how to answer Rose’s question. Jack stood behind Rose, and his eyes pierced into hers, as fear crept up her spine. For some reason Jack Dawson made her uneasy, and Cecile blinked, looking from Jack to Rose, struggling with what she should say.

“Well?” Rose folded her arms, still glaring at Cecile, and Cecile’s eyes swept the room, coming to a stop at Miranda’s dresser.

She pointed, finally managing to speak. “Perfume. Miranda gave me permission to borrow her perfume,” Cecile lied. She glanced at Jack, again feeling uneasy. *When Jack looked at her, Cecile felt as if he could see right through her!*

Anxious to get away from their probing eyes, she grabbed the tiny vial of perfume. With her head down, she swept from the room so quickly that she bumped right into Jack!

 “Whoa,” said Jack while he managed to balance on his crutches, backing up a few steps as if he were reluctant to touch her. Struggling to keep her equilibrium, she lifted her head and found Jack still staring at her with his beautiful, unnerving blue-green eyes. Running down the hallway, clutching the perfume, she entered her room, slamming the door behind her, and then leaning back against her bedroom wall.

 Her heart pounded with an erratic rhythm and her light-headedness returned. She really needed to eat something before she passed out, however she didn’t want to risk walking past Lily’s room right now to get to the kitchen. Sweat dripped down her face and she wiped the slick moisture away from her forehead. Hearing Jack’s and Lily’s voices down the hallway, she couldn’t make out what they were saying, but, she figured they were talking about her.

 Nervous sweat glistened from her hands and as she stumbled to her bed, she dropped the vial of perfume and it shattered against the wooden floor, filling her room with a sickeningly sweet scent. “Oh, no,” she cried softly, falling onto the bed. How was she going to explain this to Miranda?

 Curling her lithe, skeletal body into a tight ball, she closed her eyes, hoping to get a few hours rest while she recuperated from this morning’s stressful ordeal.

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 I heard a crash coming from Cecile’s room. I glanced at Jack, momentarily forgetting my intense fatigue. “What was that?” I asked.

 “Cecile probably dropped Miranda’s perfume.” I dropped onto the bed, closing my eyes. There was a chair in the corner and Jack pulled it over to the bed so that he could sit beside me and watch me while I slept. He left the bedroom door cracked, just in case Mrs. Roker said anything about my having a male in the bedroom alone. Jack spoke. “You know Cecile is lying about the perfume. That’s not why she was in your room.”

 “Hmm. I know.” I began drifting off to sleep. “She’s up to no good. It wouldn’t surprise me if she’s hiding from the law. She was probably looking to see if Miranda and I had some money hidden away. She was probably going to steal it.”

 “I don’t know why she was in your room, but, I just know she’s up no good. She’s dangerous, Rose, and the sooner we can get away from her the better.”

 I drifted off to sleep, snuggling beneath my comfortable blanket. When I awakened two hours later, Jack had vacated his chair and now stood at the window, using his crutches for balance. He stared at the cherry blossom tree blooming a short distance away. I wondered if he were admiring the beauty of the wonderful, vivid pink blossoms or, if he were thinking about something really hard. Jack would do that sometimes, stare off into the distance as he thought about things. I recalled when I’d told him that I didn’t want to see him again, when I’d been convinced by my mother that the right thing to do would be to marry Cal Hockley. When I’d found Jack later, after I’d changed my mind, he’d been staring off into the sea, and I’d sensed that I’d hurt his feelings. I’d been scared, too scared to anger my mother by loving Jack Dawson. I winced, again recalling how my mother had disowned me as her daughter.

 I yawned and Jack turned away from the window and looked at me. My heart curled with pleasure when I was rewarded with Jack’s charming smile. “Hi, Rose. I’m glad to see you’re awake.”

 He came over to the bed, dropped his crutches onto the floor as he settled into the vacant chair. Noises came from downstairs in the kitchen and I figured Geri was about to serve lunch. “Did you want to stay and get something to eat?”

 “Geri came in while you were asleep. She said she’d be serving lunch soon. I told her I couldn’t stay, but she offered to pack me a sandwich to eat later.”

 I sighed. “Do you have to leave? Can’t we spend the rest of the day together?”

 Jack shook his head. “No, I have to get to the dock to go to work.” He glanced at a watch on his wrist. “I’ve already missed half my day.”

 I furrowed my brow, wondering what he was talking about. “Work?”

 He nodded. “Remember? I have to work for a living.” Chuckling, he took his fingers and ran them through my tangled red tresses. I sighed with pleasure. I loved it when Jack toyed with my hair.

 “You’re going to the docks to do sketches?”

 “Yes.” He released my hair and I rested my head in his lap. “A lot of people are dressed up after church, and they come to the dock to walk around. When they see I do sketches, lots of people will give me a dime to do a quick sketch. It’s quick cash, and you know we need the money.”

 I smiled, loving the way he said that. He’d said “we” as if we were a married couple. I then recalled what he’d said about Cecile before I’d drifted off to sleep. “What did you mean about my getting away from Cecile – the sooner the better?”

 He ran his long fingers over my neck and I giggled, loving the tickly feel of his fingers against my neck. “It’s a long story. I’ll explain later. I’m going to stop by the kitchen to get the sandwich that Geri promised me before I leave. Geri said it’d be best if you came down for lunch. Mrs. Roker wants to have a meeting with all of her boarders.”

 My heart skipped and I sat up. “Oh, no.”

 Jack caressed my face. “What’s wrong?”

 “What if Mrs. Roker wants to remind us that we’ll be leaving soon, and that we’ll need to make arrangements if we want to stay after the Titanic fund money has run out?”

 Jack sighed. “Rose, don’t worry about that. Just wait and see what Mrs. Roker says. Geri didn’t look worried when she gave me the message.” I frowned, still upset about Mrs. Roker’s meeting.

 “Rose, stop worrying, okay?” He pulled me into his strong arms. “Give me a kiss before I leave.” Our mouths joined in an earth-shattering kiss. Jack ended the kiss, caressing my face. “Take care of yourself.” His lips touched my forehead before he released me, gathering his crutches before standing.

 I didn’t want him to leave! “When will you be back?”

 He sighed. “I’m not sure. I might be able to come by tomorrow, but, it’ll be shortly before your curfew. I have to work as many hours as I can – you know how much we need money. I promise I’ll be back soon, okay?”

 “Okay.” I watched him walk out my bedroom door before heading down the steps. A minute or two later, I heard the front door close, signaling that Jack had left for work. I laid back onto my pillow, sighing. I missed Jack already.

 I finally managed to get out of bed and get ready for lunch. When I entered the kitchen, I saw that Miranda had returned and Cecile also sat at the table. She refused to look at me, staring at her empty white plate.

Geri pulled me aside. “How are you doing?”

I sighed. “I’m okay.”

“What happened to you last night?” she whispered.

I shook my head, not wanting to talk about what had happened the previous day. “I promise to tell you after lunch.”

After Geri had said grace, we enjoyed the fried chicken, vegetables and mashed potatoes that Geri had prepared for lunch. My stomach felt normal, and I was grateful that I didn’t feel sick this afternoon. I was shocked when Cecile placed a piece of chicken and some potatoes onto her plate. She ate more than usual, which was weird. Cecile noticed me staring at her, but she quickly looked away, as if ashamed.

While I enjoyed the mouth-watering, moist chicken and creamy mashed potatoes, I wondered what Cecile would say to Miranda about the perfume. Miranda was going to notice the perfume missing as soon as she got into the room. Then, I glanced at Cecile again. She continued to eat slowly, occasionally lifting her water glass with her bony fingers. *I couldn’t stand this woman!* It wouldn’t surprise me if she lied to Miranda and said that I was responsible for Miranda’s missing perfume!

I finished my meal, satisfied. Geri brewed a pot of coffee and as she poured it into the thick white china mugs, I scrunched my nose at the terrible smell. “Geri, could I have a glass of milk, please.” I suddenly craved a cold, creamy glass of milk. Geri served me the milk and then she returned to the table with a platter of pastries. The scent of apples and cinnamon filled the air, making my mouth water for the treats. “What are those?”

Geri smiled. “When Mrs. Roker said today was a special occasion, she told me to make something special for dessert. I figured you ladies would enjoy some of my apple tarts.”

I frowned, not understanding. “What special occasion?”

Geri shrugged. “Not sure. Mrs. Roker should be in here in a few minutes and she’ll fill you in on the details.”

Once we’d devoured the sweet, tasty apple tarts, Mrs. Roker came into the kitchen. She glanced the table, smiling, as if satisfied we’d eaten our fill. “I’m glad to see you girls have enjoyed your lunch. I want you to come into the sitting room with me for a few minutes.”

We entered the sitting room. Cecile still kept her head down, and I wondered when would be a good time to bring up the missing perfume. I didn’t want Miranda to discover it missing and then assume that I’d taken the item! We sat on the comfortable furniture, and Mrs. Roker stood in the front of the room. Noise came from the kitchen and I assumed Geri was cleaning up after our tasty lunch. I realized I still needed to speak with Geri to fill her in on what happened to me yesterday.

Mrs. Roker spoke. “Since you girls docked awhile back, there have been several wealthy people who have given lots of money to the Titanic fund. Since I’m housing the three of you, the fund trustees have approached me and they’ve agreed to pay for your rooms for the next several months! She clapped her hands, her eyes sparkling with glee. “So, I just wanted to make this announcement to you because I know that you were worried about making a living.”

My heart thudded with happiness! At least I had a bit more time to stay in this house. I didn’t think I’d stay for several more months because my stomach would start expanding and I was sure Mrs. Roker would kick me out once she found out I was pregnant. However, I still had a bit more time to figure out what I needed to do.

After Mrs. Roker made her announcement, she left the room, leaving me, Miranda, and Cecile alone. Cecile stood, as if she were about to leave. I spoke, not giving her a chance to escape. “Don’t go yet, Cecile. Tell Miranda that you borrowed her perfume today.”

“What?” Miranda stood up, her eyes narrowing, glaring at Cecile. “What did Lily just say?”

“Cecile came into the room this morning when you were gone to borrow your perfume.”

Miranda stomped over to Cecile, her lips mashed down with anger. “What is Lily talking about?” Cecile shook her head, her pale skin reddening while Miranda stood over her. She turned, about to leave, when Miranda grabbed one of her skinny arms and squeezed. Cecile yelped, pulling away. “Give me my perfume back!”

“She said you’d given her permission to borrow the perfume.” In a rushed voice, I told Miranda about finding Cecile in our room when Jack and I had come upstairs earlier.

Cecile pulled away from Miranda, finally speaking. “I was not in your room. Lily is lying.”

My mouth dropped open. I finally realized that I needed to expose Cecile. “She was in our room. When she left, she took your perfume to her room. I heard her drop your perfume. You might want to go ahead and see if her room smells like your perfume,” I explained to Miranda in a rushed voice.

Miranda dropped Cecile’s arm, rushing upstairs. She returned a few minutes later, her eyes narrowed, her jaw clenched with anger. “Your room reeks of my perfume, and I saw the glass bottle broken on your floor.”

Miranda took several deep breaths and I figured she was trying to calm down. She then stomped over to Cecile who cowered in the corner, her skeletal body shaking like a leaf. Miranda then slapped Cecile so hard that her head snapped back, hitting the wall. Cecile raised her arms as if warding off another blow, but Miranda grabbed Cecile’s skinny arms, pulling them away from her face and slapped her again.

“Stop! Stop!” Cecile cried out, and for the first time, I felt sorry for her. Angry red welts now marred her pale skin and right now, she reminded me of a thin, frightened child.

I ran over to Miranda, placing my hand on her shoulder. “Miranda, calm down,” I said in a low voice. “I’m sure Cecile is sorry about the perfume and she’ll replace it.”

Miranda lowered her hands, stepping away from Cecile, still glaring at her, breathing heavily. “You better replace my perfume or you’ll be sorry.” She shook her head, her hands shaking with rage. “I’m so sick and tired of you, Cecile. You walk around here with your nose in the air as if you’re better than everybody. Then you sneak around here, hiding, listening. You act like you’re some beautiful, holy woman when you look terrible! If I ever hear about you in our room again, I’m going to really get angry.” In a rush, Miranda left the room.

Cecile stood in the corner of the sitting room, her hand caressing her cheek. She glanced at me before she rushed from the room before Geri entered, wiping her hands on a towel. She spotted Cecile flying up the steps and she glanced at me, her brown eyes curious. “What was all that noise I heard in here?”

I sighed, dropping into a chair, telling Geri about the nature of Cecile and Miranda’s argument. She didn’t seem surprised. “You better watch yourself with her.”

“Who, Miranda?”

Geri shook her head. “No, Cecile. I caught her listening in on you and Jack earlier today.”

I gasped. “You mean when we were in the sitting room?”

Geri nodded. “That woman is nothing but trouble. When you and Miranda leave your room, you better lock your door.” Geri sat on the couch, still focusing on me. “Now, I don’t want to talk about Cecile anymore. I want to talk about you. What happened to you yesterday?”

I quickly told Geri about my conversation with my mother and that I’d slept in the alley. I didn’t realize I’d started crying again until Geri handed me a handkerchief. “I’m sorry about that, Lily. I’ll be sure to keep your mother in my prayers.”

“Don’t pray for my mom. She doesn’t deserve it.” I couldn’t keep the bitter tone from my voice.

“Honey, everybody deserves prayer. Your mother might have a change of heart one day and you might be able to forgive her.”

I shivered, wiping my wet eyes. “I doubt I’ll ever forgive her since I don’t think I’ll ever see her again.”

Geri stood and walked toward me and patted my shoulder. She then left the room to return to the kitchen since she still had a lot of work to do.

I leaned my head back on the chair, placing my hand over my belly. Caressing my stomach, I closed my eyes, wondering what would happen to me now. When would I be seeing Jack again and what would I do when my pregnancy began to show? Would Jack and I get married, and if we did, where would be live?

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 Cal placed his hat on his head, striding to the office of Lymen Smith. Rebecca Miller, a wealthy socialite from Boston, clung to his arm like glue. He kissed her cheek, knowing how much she enjoyed public displays of affection. Rebecca was far from pretty – her nose was too long and her lips were thin as pencils, but, she did things that brought him pleasure. He smiled warmly, thinking of the time they’d spent together the previous evening. He knew he could never marry her, in spite of her good family name, the girl was too promiscuous. However, Cal would keep her around to amuse himself while he stayed in New York.

 “Oh, Cal,” giving a little giggle, she kissed his cheek while they approached the detective’s office. Cal eyed her body like a hawk, loving the way the cherry red dress molded to her trim waist and full breasts. Cal noticed that Lymen’s secretary was not at her desk. He stopped walking, taking Rebecca into his arms and kissing her on the mouth, enjoying the feel of her tongue against his. He sighed with pleasure, pulling away. “Why do we have to come and see this detective? Wouldn’t you have more fun spending your afternoon in my hotel room?”

 Cal grinned, stroking her cheek. “I have some business to attend to here. You can wait in that chair over there. I promise I won’t be long.”

 Pouting, Rebecca flounced over to the padded chair, sitting.

 Cal rapped on Lymen’s door.

 “Come in,” Lymen barked.

 Cal entered the office, spotting Lymen sitting in a chair, smoking a cigarette and he was also enjoying a drink. Cal slammed the door, making himself comfortable in a chair. He lit a cigar, focusing on the detective. It had been six weeks since the sinking of the Titanic and Lymen had not made a whole lot of progress on his case, that is, until today.

 When Cal had received word that Lymen Smith needed to speak with him, he’d cleared his day’s schedule immediately, desperate to find out what the detective had to tell him. He took a long drag from his cigar, focusing on Lymen. “So, Lymen, what do you have to tell me?”

 Lymen pulled a thick white sheaf of papers from his drawer. “Things have been chaotic since the sinking of the Titanic. It’s been hard to get a master list of survivors. So, what I was able to get was to get a master list of the passengers who were scheduled to board the Titanic, and then I got a list of the names of the Titanic passengers who docked in New York.”

 Cal shrugged, still wondering if he were wasting his money by hiring this detective. After all, it’d been six weeks. How long did it take to find one woman? “So, what did you find out?”

 “There were two people that got off of the Carpathia and were Titanic survivors, yet, they were not listed on the original roster of Titanic passengers.”

Cal frowned, not fully understanding what Lymen was talking about. “Well, what about these two people? Is one of them Rose Dewitt Bukater?”

Lymen shrugged. “I’m thinking that your fiancée—”

“Ex-fiancée,” Cal corrected.

“Well, your ex-fiancée used an alias. Anyway, these are the two people that are mysterious. It’s possible that they purchased their ticket from another passenger who changed their mind about boarding the ship, or, it’s possible that one of these women is Rose using a fake name.” Lymen continued to explain. “When I looked at the list of Titanic passengers, there were some listed who never boarded. There was a couple, a husband and wife by the last name of Baker, who never boarded the ship. Also, there were two men, brothers, named Sven and Olaf Larsen who never boarded. It’s possible that these two women purchased Sven’s ticket, or, the ticket of the non-boarding couple.”

Cal studied the paper on top of the stack, noticing that Lymen had circled two names:

Cecile Black

Lily Jackson

Lymen continued to speak. “I think I need to find these two women. Once I discover where each of them is staying, I think it’ll help with my search. There’s no record of Rose getting off the Carpathia, yet, I know she survived because you told me you spoke to her while on the Carpathia. Rose did not die while on that ship because she’s not listed on the Carpathia’s death roster.”

Cal remained silent, studying the names of the two women. “Find them. Find both of these women as quickly as you can. If one of them is Rose, I promise to pay you double.”

Lymen stood, his eyes widening at Cal’s offer. He offered his hand to Cal. “Mr. Hockley, I promise to do my best to find these women.”

The two men shook hands, ending their business meeting.

**Chapter 18**

Jack couldn’t believe it had been two months since they’d docked in New York on the Carpathia. After Rose’s mother had disowned her, and Rose had spent the night in the alley, it was only a matter of days before she was back to her usual self. Jack had gotten into the habit of visiting Rose in the evening, for about an hour right before her curfew. He’d gotten so popular on the docks with his sketches that he found he had to spend all of his time during the day doing drawings.

At times, when he arrived back at Pastor Michael’s house, his arms and fingers were sore from sketching so many pictures. Thelma always kept a plate of food warmed for him to eat for dinner every night and Jack had also gotten to know Paul pretty well. One late Saturday night, after dinner, he sat with Paul out on the steps of Pastor Michael’s shabby apartment building. The twosome smoked recently-rolled cigarettes, the smoke curling into the warm, pre-summer air. Jack still found it hard to believe that Paul was considered Black, even though his skin was almost as white as Jack’s. “Have you spoken to Thelma this evening?” asked Paul.

Jack shook his head, taking another drag from his cigarette. A slight breeze blew, cooling his warm skin. “Did she have something to tell me?”

Paul chuckled, his dark eyes sparkling with warmth. “I asked her to marry me and she said yes.”

Jack hollered, sharing a hearty handshake with Paul. “Congratulations! When’s the wedding?”

Paul shrugged, taking a puff from his cigarette. “Not sure, hopefully sometime this summer. You know, Jack, Thelma makes me happy.” He sighed. “I’d like to take her to New Orleans to meet my family, but…”

“But?” Jack prompted.

“My family doesn’t like that I’m dating Thelma because she is so dark, much darker than I. I’m not sure if they’ll ever accept her.” He even went on to explain that his parents had introduced him to quadroon and octoroon women, wishing he’d marry one of them. “They said they don’t want me to suffer by being with a dark woman. They don’t want their grandchildren to be dark.” He sighed. “I’m marrying Thelma because I love her, and I could care less about her skin color. I can understand why my parents feel that way, though.”

Jack vaguely recalled Thelma telling him about the problems she’d had with her relationship with Paul because of his race. He’d found it disheartening that people in Pastor Michael’s church didn’t accept Paul because of his light skin. “Why do your parents feel this way?”

Paul sighed, scuffing the toe of his shoe against the bottom step. “They feel this way because if we have darker children, life will be harder for them. When I’m out in the world, a lot people assume that I’m white because of my light skin. I’m not always treated as bad as the darker-skinned Blacks. If Thelma and I have dark children, their lives won’t be so easy. They’ll face a lot of hardships because of their skin tone.”

Jack nodded, completely understanding Paul’s plight. “That’s a shame, Paul. Too bad we live in a country that treats people that way.” Taking a deep breath, he wondered why the Lord let certain things happen. Why were Blacks treated so unfairly in the United States? When Jack had been in Paris, he noticed that the Blacks he’d seen were treated fairly, equally. From what he’d seen, there was no discrimination against Blacks in Paris, and he wished it was like that over here in New York as well as the other states.

Paul spoke. “Pastor Michael told me that you and Rose have had your share of problems since you met on the Titanic.”

Glad for the change in subject, in a rushed voice, Jack told of Rose’s mother disowning her, and about how he’d stopped Rose from jumping off the Titanic when she’d been forced to marry Cal, a man she did not love. “She only wanted to marry him to get her family out of debt, plus, he has a good family name. Rose’s mom’s attitude reminds me of your family’s attitude about Thelma. They don’t care about the person, they only care about superficial things. And that’s so sad.” Lamenting, Jack extinguished his cigarette, throwing the bud into the street.

Paul nodded. “I agree. So, when are you going to ask Rose to marry you?”

Jack sighed, placing his forehead into his hand, thinking. “It’ll have to be soon. Her stomach is going to be showing, and I don’t think Mrs. Roker will let her stay in the boarding house when she discovers Rose is pregnant.”

Jack flexed his sore fingers, recalling the stash of coins he’d collected from his sketches. He now made enough money to rent a small apartment. He’d been scouting around until he’d found something affordable. He knew that he couldn’t afford to give Rose a wedding, but, at least they’d have each other. He figured Pastor Michael could marry them.

The only time that Jack took off from working at the docks on his sketches was Sunday morning when he attended church. He’d gotten into the habit of bringing Rose with him to services, and at first she’d been hesitant about going to Pastor Michael’s church. “You’d said that they didn’t initially accept you because you were White,” she’d reminded Jack. “What makes you think they’d accept me?”

“Rose, they’ll accept you because I love you. They accept me now because they know my heart is sincere. I truly want to place God first in our lives. Our lives were spared after the Titanic sank and we have to thank God for that.”

Later that night, after his conversation with Paul, when Jack slipped into his bed, he continued thinking about Rose. The woman dominated his mind and he sensed that he needed to get her out of that rooming house where she’d been staying. He found himself worrying about her and he had no idea why. *Lord, why am I so worried about Rose?*

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I dabbed the last of my rosewater behind my ears, hoping I could purchase a new vial of the sweet-smelling concoction soon. I had to be careful with the little bit of money that I had. I then thought about Jack’s money situation. He’d been working hard and I figured that he wanted to make enough money so that he would no longer have to rely on Pastor Michael’s charity.

I removed my worn brown dress from the hangar in the closet, pulling it on. I gasped, noting how the garment tugged on my expanding middle. I stopped moving, staring at my stomach. I took my hand and caressed the mound where our baby was growing. I wondered how long it would be before I felt the baby moving. Continuing to caress my stomach, I sighed, wondering how long I’d be able to wear this dress. Thank God I no longer had to wear a corset – there were a few advantages to being poor. I no longer had to put on airs, and that was a good thing.

However, I did find myself missing some of the comforts from my days of being rich. I missed having several personal servants and I also missed being pampered. I pushed the thoughts away from my mind, focusing on the present. There was no sense in my lamenting about some of the happier comforts I’d enjoyed as a wealthy woman.

A knock sounded from the front door. As fast as I could, I rushed out of my bedroom and down the stairs. Jack had taken a couple of precious hours off during daylight, stating that he needed to speak to me about something important. I opened the door, and my heart thudded with pride when I spotted Jack standing on the steps. He wore a freshly laundered shirt and his hair was slicked back from his handsome face. He looked so good that I was momentarily speechless. I swallowed, realizing that my throat was dry. “Hi, Jack,” I breathed.

“Hi, Rose. Are you ready to go?”

I nodded. “Let me just go and get my purse.”

I turned to head inside to go back up the stairs and he grabbed my arm, forcing me to stay. “Don’t forget to lock your bedroom door,” he whispered.

I nodded, agreeing.

“I’ll just wait for you out here on the steps,” Jack stated.

I nodded. “All right.” I headed back upstairs and spotted Cecile lurking in the hallway. Her dark dress hung on her gaunt frame. When she spied me, she quickly turned, heading back into her room, slamming the door behind her. I shook my head as I entered my bedroom and gathered my purse and my handkerchief, wondering what was up with that strange woman.

Since Miranda had slapped Cecile, Cecile’s behavior had not gotten any better. We always locked our door as a precaution, but, Cecile still lurked in stairways, in corners, outside of rooms. She was so quiet and so skinny that at times, you’d barely notice her presence. I shivered. The woman was downright creepy and I had no idea what she was up to. It had been a bit horrifying to see Miranda slap Cecile so hard – I didn’t realize my roommate’s temper could explode like a cannon. Cecile’s face had been marred with a bruise for at least a couple of days after Miranda had slapped her.

Miranda had explained that she’d lived a rough life, raised in an orphanage. Miranda had to fight to keep people from stealing her stuff during most of her life, and now, as an adult, she felt she had to protect all of her belongings. When she’d discovered that Cecile had touched her things, destroyed her perfume, then lied about it, Miranda’s anger had exploded and she claimed she couldn’t help her erratic temper.

I shook thoughts of Miranda and creepy Cecile from my mind, focusing on Jack, the man that I loved. I loved that man so much that it ached – it was a burning sensation that shivered through me, making me crave Jack Dawson’s presence both day and night. Before going downstairs, I stopped, closed my eyes, and took a deep breath. *Lord, please help me through this day.* I poured some water into a cup and drank a few sips to ease my dry throat. I was excited – excited and a bit nervous. *Why did Jack want to speak with me today?*

After locking my bedroom door, I took my time, walking down the steps slowly. I finally opened the front door and Jack stood on the steps, his hands in the pockets of his pants. I was glad that his broken leg had healed and he no longer had to use those blasted crutches. I realized his hands jiggled in the pockets of his pants. *Why was Jack so nervous?*

He removed one of his hands from his pocket, and took my hand. He gave me a small smile before we walked down the steps and started down the sidewalk. “Jack, where are we going?”

“There’s a nice park that I found not too far from here. I think you’ll like it. It won’t take us too long to walk over there.” So, Jack had taken time away from his sketches so that we could walk to the park? I furrowed my brow, thinking. I imagined he had something important to discuss with me. Blocking out the sounds of cars, horse-drawn wagons, and people, I focused on Jack while we strolled down the street, holding hands. A bead of sweat rolled down his brow, and, unable to resist the urge, I took my finger and wiped the sweat away.

His wonderful blue-green eyes widened and he stopped walking, looking directly at me. “We’ll be there in a few minutes, okay?”

I nodded, my heart pounding. After making several turns, we arrived at the quaint park. He led me to a small wooden bench and we sat, still holding hands. My nervous heart thudded as I gazed at our beautiful surroundings. A small stone fountain shot a gust of water into the air and a mass of tiny dark birds landed in the water, playing, flapping their wings with glee. “So pretty,” I breathed.

I then spotted several rose bushes planted around the park. They’d burst into blossom, displaying lush, vivid red roses. I sniffed, realizing the air was perfumed with the sweet scent of the blossoms. I loved this park. It was the prettiest place I’d seen since we’d docked in New York. Jack stroked my cheek. “This park isn’t half as pretty as you, Rose.” A slight breeze blew, warming my heated skin.

My heart skipped, and I tried to calm my breathing. “Thank you, Jack.”

Jack continued to stroke my cheek, and I lavished his touch. When he leaned toward me, his lips touched mine with a feather-light kiss. He pulled away, his face close to mine. I stared into the depths of his amazing eyes. He cupped my cheek in his strong hand, and I could tell from the intense expression on his face that he had something important that he had to say. “You are the most beautiful, amazing woman that I’ve ever met.”

“Oh, Jack—”

He shook his head. “Don’t interrupt me. Just let me get this out.”

I balled my hands into fists, trying to calm my frazzled nerves. Being with Jack, in this beautiful park, with him saying these amazing things to me made my emotions twirl with glee. “You are the most wonderful, beautiful, amazing lady I’ve ever met. I never thought that I’d ever meet a woman who could capture my heart the way you’ve captured mine, Rose.” He leaned toward me, his lips touching mine briefly before he continued. “I love you so much. I want to be with you, Rose, every day.” He leaned toward my ear, speaking with his beautiful, well-sculpted lips. His breath tickled my ear, causing an amazing sensation to shatter through my soul. I blinked, wondering about the emotions that Jack stirred within me. Taking his strong hand, he fanned his fingers over my stomach, caressing our baby. I shivered with delight, relishing his touch. “Will you marry me, Rose?” he breathed the words into my ear, startling me.

**Chapter 19**

Jack stroked Rose’s face, noting her startled expression. Her lips then eased into a slow smile, and his heart raced when she moaned before pulling him into a hug. He placed his arms around her, returning her embrace. Sniffing, he relished the scent of roses behind her cute ears. When she pulled away, he spotted her green eyes glistening before a tears slid down her cheeks. “Hey, no crying.” His lips touched her soft, tear-stained cheek, but she chuckled softly, signaling his question had made her immensely happy.

“Oh, Jack. Yes, I’ll marry you!”

Jack whooped, pumping his fist into the air. Joy filled his soul. Right now, he was so ecstatic that he felt his happiness would burst right out of him, just like the water gushing from the nearby fountain. He hugged Rose again before leaning his forehead against hers, staring into her amazing jade green eyes. He then pressed his lips to hers, their tongues playing a mating game. Arousal rushed through him and he ended the kiss, pulling away, taking her hands into his. Taking a few deep breaths, he calmed down, knowing that he needed to speak with her about some important matters.

“Jack, what’s wrong? Why are you suddenly so serious?”

“I have something serious that I wanted to discuss with you.” He took a deep breath, gathering his courage. “You know that we’ve been attending Pastor Michael’s church lately and that I’ve given my heart to Jesus.”

She nodded, her vivid red hair glistening in the bright sunlight. He took a few strands of her hair and massaged it in his fingers, enjoying the silky feel of her hair. “Well, Pastor Michael said that I needed to get baptized.” He took a deep breath before continuing. “I’m going to get baptized next Sunday. The whole church is traveling to a river to watch Pastor Michael baptize me.” He paused again, still unsure how Rose would respond to his request. “Well, if you’ve accepted Jesus into your heart too, I wondered if you’d get baptized with me next Sunday. We can bring a change of clothes and Pastor Michael said he’d marry us afterwards.”

Rose remained silent, and Jack wondered what she was thinking. Was she upset that he could not provide the large, expensive, beautiful wedding that she would’ve gotten if she’d married Cal Hockley? Did she not want to join him in baptism? His heart skipped when she finally spoke. Her lovely voice surrounded him, making him feel good. Jack felt as if the two of them were in a world of their own, their own happy world with no heartache or distractions. He paid no attention to their beautiful surroundings - he just focused on Rose’s lovely face.

“Oh, Jack. I think my mom and dad had me baptized when I was a baby. My dad told me about it once. She had this huge party and invited all these people, trying hard to impress people with their wealth--”

He cut her off, caressing her face, loving the way her milky soft white skin felt against his pencil-stained fingers. “Honey, it’s fine that you mom and dad did that, but Pastor Michael suggested that your day of baptism should be a day that you remember. I know you’ve been praying, and Geri’s been telling you about the Bible and you’ve mentioned to me that you want to place God first in your heart.”

“Oh, Jack. I want to, but it’s so hard to do. I hate my mother. I know it’s wrong for me to feel that way, but, I hate my mom.” She bit her bottom lip, as if upset. Jack kissed her forehead, trying to calm her down, hoping she’d continue to speak. “I also hate Cal.” She shook her head. “It’s hard for me to explain, but, even though both of them are out of my life, I can’t stop thinking about how badly they treated me.” She took a deep breath before continuing. “It still bothers me that I have Cal’s necklace, The Heart Of The Ocean.”

“Oh, Rose, you’re only human. Just place God first in your life and ask Him to help you with these feelings against your mom and Cal. God doesn’t expect us to be perfect, he just wants us to do the best that we can.” He squeezed her fingers, pressing his lips to the palm of her hand. “We can discuss Cal’s necklace after we’ve been baptized. I have no idea how we’re going to return it to him, but, maybe the Lord will show us a way.”

Rose took another deep breath, and Jack sensed that she had more that she wanted to discuss with him. “I also have negative feelings about Cecile. Whenever I see her lurking in the hallways, and hiding in corners…” she shivered, and Jack understood how she felt. “I just don’t like her, and I know the Lord doesn’t like hatred.”

“Honey, you’re not perfect. Look, that’s another reason why I want to marry you soon. Not only do I love you, and want to be with you every day, but, I feel that the Lord wants you out of that rooming house, away from Cecile.” He shook his head, trying to let Rose know how he felt. “You know that I don’t trust Cecile, either. Actually, I’m not sure if I should tell you this, but…I’ve been worried about you and I don’t understand why. I want you out of Mrs. Roker’s house and I want you to come and live with me.”

Her lovely eyes widened and she frowned. “You’ve been worried about me?”

Jack balled his hands into fists, wondering if he needed to tell Rose about his disturbing thoughts. He didn’t want to make her upset. Taking a deep breath, he forced himself to remain calm. “I’ve sensed that you need protection.” Taking his hand, he pressed it against her stomach, massaging her belly. “I don’t want anything to happen to you or the baby.”

“Jack, I think we’ll be fine. You’re probably still upset because of all the death we witnessed on the Titanic. It’s hard to feel safe after seeing so many people die,” she said softly.

He nodded. “Yes, you’re probably right. I still have nightmares about it and I want to do all that I can to protect both you and our baby.”

Rose voiced her concern. “But, what about Pastor Michael? I know he doesn’t want another houseguest.”

Jack leaned back onto the bench, holding Rose in both of his arms. “I’ve found us a place. It’s not much, but, we can live there, together as husband and wife, after we’ve gotten married on Sunday. So, will you get baptized with me before we get married?”

Rose blinked, nodding her head. “I really want to place Jesus first in my life but, I feel so inadequate with how I feel about people.”

“Honey, we’re all inadequate, but, the Lord knows that our hearts are sincere and all that we can do is pray about it and do our best to live our lives the best we can.”

Their foreheads touching, their heads bowed, Jack clutched Rose’s hands and he lifted his voice in prayer.

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The following Sunday I awakened so early that it was still dark outside. I glanced at the clock – four AM. Glancing around the semi-darkened room, I realized this was my wedding day! A few months ago, I’d been all set, against my wishes, to marry Cal Hockley at the hugest social event of the season with well over five hundred invitations sent to potential guests. I took a few moments to think about what my mother had tried to force me to do. Cal and I would’ve been married in a huge Catholic church decorated with tons of sweet-smelling flowers. I’d imagine that myriads of guests would’ve dominated the pews, the men wearing suits and the women wearing all sorts of fancy pastel-colored dresses. The women would probably have had hats perched upon their heads. After the awful ceremony where I would’ve had to lie, promising to love, honor, and obey Cal, there would have been a massive wedding reception with a huge vanilla cake decorated with flowers and overly-sweet icing.

I sighed, thinking about my REAL wedding. I’d be married, near a river, in a woods, with an old, brown dress, no money, and a whole congregation of Blacks – people who’d shown me more caring and compassion then my mom had ever shown me in her lifetime. I imagined my mother’s reaction if she were to witness my wedding today. I giggled, realizing that my actions would probably cause my mother to have a heart attack. My actions would probably disturb her so much that she’d keel over and die, mortified that I had subjected my life to such a low level! I pushed the thoughts about my mom away, ashamed.

I sighed, tossing in my bed. Miranda’s deep, even breathing filled the room. I’d thought about asking her to come to my wedding, but, I wasn’t sure if she’d want to come. Miranda and I were friendly, but we weren’t really close. Geri had arranged with Mrs. Roker to have the day off so that she could attend my baptism and wedding with me. So, I was pleased that I’d have at least one friend in attendance. I’d even sat Geri down, telling her that my name was really Rose and not Lily, and why I had chosen that name when we’d docked. Geri seemed worried about Cal’s necklace, and she’d said that we really needed to try and think of a way to return the necklace to Cal.

Pushing thoughts of Cal and The Heart Of The Ocean out of my mind, I got out of bed, knowing I wouldn’t be able to go back to sleep. I needed to go through my meager belongings, and figure out how I’m make myself more presentable for my wedding day.

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Jack stepped into the frigid water of the river. “This is cold!” His teeth chattered and vivid memories of being stuck in the middle of the ocean, dying, filled his mind. He shook the thought away. *Lord, why am I being haunted about the Titanic sinking on the happiest day of my life?* Pastor Michael grabbed Jack’s hand, forcing him into the water.

“Jack, don’t let those negative thoughts get to you. We’ll get you through this,” advised Pastor Michael. The water rushed by, gushing over smooth rocks. Jack stared at the river, noticing the sparkling diamond-like chips caused from the bright sun shining on the rushing water. He blinked, mesmerized by the beauty of this secluded river.

“Jack, you’ve accepted Jesus into your heart?”

“Yes, I have.”

“Jack Dawson, I baptize you now in the name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit!” Jack pinched his nose with the fingers on his left hand, with his right hand he held his left arm right below the wrist. Falling back against the pastor’s hand, dipping into the cold water, his entire body immersed beneath the surface. Cold liquid surrounded him, pebbles dug beneath the soles of his feet, water rushed to his ears. *Lord, I love you with all my heart and soul.* Jack popped back out of the water, moisture dripping from his body. Clapping and praises filled the warm summer air. Jack looked up into the vivid blue sky dotted with white fluffy clouds. Breathing deeply, he smiled, feeling ecstatic.

“Praise Jesus! Jack’s baptized!” The congregation cheered. He eyed Pastor Michael’s entire congregation standing at the side of the river, their smiling, mocha-colored faces making him feel happy and free.

He climbed out of the water, spotting Rose at the side. She appeared apprehensive, her jade green eyes widened as she stepped into the water, her lovely feet touching the smooth pebbles dotting the river floor. He stroked her cheek. He gave her a feather-light kiss, caressing her cheek. “It’ll be okay. You’ll see.”

Rose remained speechless as she walked further into the water toward Pastor Michael, wearing the bathing suit that had been donated by the sisters of the church.

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“Rose Dewitt Bukater, I baptize you in the name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit!” The water rushed around me as I went beneath the surface. When I emerged, I felt clean and happy! After I climbed out of the water, Jack met me at the side, pulling me into his arms, letting out a loud whoop!

Later, after I had dried myself with a towel and cleaned up, the church sisters were helping me to get ready for the wedding. I was amazed at all they’d done for this special day! There was makeup, perfume and the final touch was a white wedding dress etched with roses! I nearly cried with joy when I saw it. I fingered the material, realizing the dress was probably worth a fortune. One of the church sisters explained. “This is just a dress that we were able to borrow for the day. One of the church sisters works at a seamstress shop and the dress was ordered but the wedding was cancelled. We talked to the shop manager and he agreed to let us use it for the day.” She shook her head. “We were praying hard that day because we were sure he’d say no, but, sometimes, the Lord will bless us with a little surprise.”

“Thank you,” I gushed.

When I was ready, I walked down the carpet of grass, clutching my small bouquet of fragrant purple lilies, meeting Jack under a huge oak tree. The tree’s canopy of jade green leaves created an umbrella of shade over us. Jack’s mesmerizing blue-green eyes widened when he spotted me in my dress. He wore a new white shirt and new pants, and his shiny, black leather shoes were new, too. He looked so good that it was hard for me to concentrate on the ceremony. Pastor Michael’s church members stood around us, enshrouding us with their love and support. My best friend Geri stood beside me, offering me her friendship and happiness on this day. I realized she wore a peach-colored dress, and I recalled telling Jack that I’d wanted my bridesmaids to wear peach-colored dresses to my wedding. Another part of my dream wedding had come true! I handed my bouquet to Geri to hold for me during the ceremony.

Pastor Michael spoke. “Rose, Jack requested that both of you say what’s on your heart before I officially marry you. He said you could go first.”

I swallowed, surprised about this. “Jack, the day I met you on the Titanic was one of the most sad, yet most amazing days of my life. I was trapped, trapped to marry a man who did not love me. But, you saved me from making a huge mistake.” My voice carried on, speaking about how I’d met Jack. I spoke about how we’d grown closer during the small slice of time we’d been on the Titanic. I even mentioned that we were expecting a baby. I talked so much that my voice cracked, and someone gave me a cup of water. I sipped, loving the smile on Jack’s face. “I’m so proud to become your wife, Jack.”

“Rose, you are the most wonderful, amazing, beautiful woman I’ve ever met.” Jack’s wonderful voice sounded in the woods. His voice was loud and full of pride – he was proud that I was becoming his wife. He spoke about the first time he saw me on deck on the Titanic from afar. He mentioned how he’d stopped me from making the biggest mistake of my life. He told of the deep friendship we developed on the Titanic – a friendship that turned into love. His voice sounded so surreal – I loved listening to him. He stopped speaking, caressing my cheek with his fingers. “I’m so proud to make you my wife. We’ve been through a lot, but, Rose, I think the Lord wants us to be together. I love you so much, so much.”

“I love you, too, Jack.”

Pastor Michael cleared his throat. “I think the two of you have said it all. Jack, do you take Rose Dewitt Bukater to be your wife?”

Jack nodded. “I do.”

“Rose, do you take Jack Dawson to be your husband?”

“I do.”

“By the power vested to me by the state of New York, I now announce you as husband and wife!”

Jack whooped, pulling me into his strong arms. He then cupped my face into both of his hands, and his lips touched mine. I opened my mouth, accepting his kiss. I closed my eyes, loving the touch and taste of Jack Dawson. A tingle of delight, almost like a wonderful electric shock, traveled from the top of my head to the tips of my toes. I popped my eyes open, drunk with happiness. Jack grinned, leaning into me. “Did you feel that, Rose?”

I nodded, too stunned to speak, sensing that the Lord had blessed us on this wonderful day. We happened to glance up at the same time and spotted a flock of birds flying in the vivid, cornflower blue sky. A warm, wonderful wind blew around us and I leaned into Jack, finding warmth and comfort from his nearness.

One of the church members began beating a drum and I soon realized that a few other church men had brought instruments. A five-piece band began playing and the entire congregation laughed while dancing. Many formed a line and did a wonderful jig around Jack and I, stepping around us, keeping rhythm. Everybody looked so wonderful and my heart was so happy that I felt like I would burst. Jack leaned into my ear. “We’re going to be partying all day. Let’s enjoy our day together.”

Nodding, I smiled in response, and he kissed me again.

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*Earlier that day, before Jack and Rose’s wedding…*

Cecile awakened, blinking her eyes against the intense sunlight streaming into her room. She glanced at her small clock noting it was ten in the morning. She brushed the crusty residue from her face, the result of crying herself to sleep the night before. She glanced at the letter she’d received the previous day. The cream-colored envelope sat on her dresser, as if mocking her. Whimpering, she brushed the fresh tears from her eyes, finding it difficult to believe what she’d read the previous day.

Shaking her head, she pulled herself out of bed. There was no reason for her to keep her strict diet any longer. She’d been naively hoping that her former lover would change his mind, and that things could work out between them, and that he’d return from Paris. But, alas, it appeared he wasn’t going to change his mind this time. The whole reason why she’d ended up on the Titanic was so complicated that she hated thinking about it. If only they’d been more careful. If only they’d tried harder to hide their secret…

She removed her nightgown, staring at her body in the full-length mirror. She’d worked hard, resisting food whenever possible, keeping her skeletal frame, knowing how much her former lover had been aroused when he’d seen her without clothing. He loved thin bodies, the thinner the better. She figured if she kept herself like this, when he finally returned from Paris, that he’d take her back. Now, it looked like she’d been doing this all for nothing! Closing her eyes, she relished the thoughts of his hugs, kisses, and his lovemaking. Moaning, her body flushed with desire before reality set in when she spotted the letter again. “Oh!” Whimpering, she covered her mouth with her shaky hands.

Naked, she fell back onto the bed, feeling dizzy. Taking a deep breath, she again realized her diet was no longer necessary. She had to survive, and in order to try and catch another man she realized she needed to gain a few pounds. She looked like a half-starved orphan, and she doubted most men would want a woman who looked like her.

Sniffing, she got dressed and washed up in the privy before going downstairs. Depressed, she stumbled into the clean, quiet kitchen, recalling that Geri had the day off. The scent of bread and butter filled the kitchen and she spotted the crusty brown loaf with a crock of butter beside it. Her mouth watered, and hunger dominated her mind. She no longer had to push feelings of hunger away – there was no purpose any longer. She needed to eat, eat and think about how she would survive now that her lover was out of the picture.

Her heart beating in anticipation, she sped over to the bread, her mouth watering so much that drool spilled down the side of her lips. As drool continued to spill down both sides of her mouth and down her neck, she pulled out drawers, searching for one object. After searching and searching, she finally found what she was looking for. The long silver-colored knife with the black handle was nestled in the back of the drawer. Breathing heavily, she removed the item and attempted to slice the bread. Her hands shook and she took a few deep breaths, trying to calm down.

A tiny mirror rested on the counter and she spotted her reflection, whimpering. She looked like a crazy woman! Her hair stuck up and drool spilled down her mouth. With her sunken cheeks and large eyes, holding the knife, she looked like a war prisoner trying to escape! “Good heavens,” she muttered to herself.

Feeling light-headed again, she thought she’d faint, but, she stopped, taking several deep breaths, still clutching the knife. When the light-headed feeling had vanished, she finally managed to slice into the bread. She cut a huge slice of bread, the scent of the bread overpowering her, making her shake with anticipation. She then slathered the piece of bread with sweet, creamy butter. She plopped onto a kitchen chair, devouring the slice of bread within minutes, taking pleasure in the taste of the soft yeasty bread and rich butter. Joy slammed through her when she realized she could have another slice!

She raced back to the loaf, and cut another slice. She ate slice after slice, slathered with yellow creamy butter. Her joy evaporated once she’d noted she’d eaten the entire loaf. Whimpering, she stood, realizing her stomach rebelled against her eating binge. Rushing upstairs, she made it to the privy just in time. She retched, her bread and butter coming back up. Her skinny body convulsed as the sour taste filled her mouth. Her body seemed to have a will of its’ own, forcing her to get rid of the food. Out of breath, she fell onto the bathroom floor, having no energy to stand. Five minutes later, she finally was able to get up and rinse her mouth out, and brush her teeth.

She headed toward her room, crying, again recalling that she was truly alone in this hated, depressing world. She glanced at the clock, noting that it was now close to noon. She was about to remove her dress when the doorbell sounded downstairs. She realized that Mrs. Roker was probably still at church and that Geri was still gone. She had to answer the door herself.

Although she looked frightful, she no longer cared. For some reason, she was curious about who would come calling on a Sunday afternoon. Rose was getting married to Jack today, so she knew Jack wouldn’t be at the door.

Downstairs, she opened the door, seeing a tall man with piercing gray eyes. His eyes widened when he saw her, and she realized that he probably thought she looked awful. He wore a derby hat and he was dressed in trousers and a white shirt. She blinked, realizing she needed to say something. “May I help you?”

“Hi, my name’s Lymen Smith.” He offered his hand, but Cecile was too tired to shake it. She shook her head, wanting to go upstairs to her bedroom and lie down. “Everybody’s gone. Did you want to leave a message?”

The man looked at her, and Cecile felt that his eyes were now filled with pity. “Are you ill?” he asked gently.

Cecile nodded. “Did you want to leave a message?”

“Maybe you can help me. I’m looking for two women. One is named Rose Dewitt Bukater and the other is named Cecile Black. Do they live here?”

Cecile gasped, placing her hand over her mouth. *Why in the world would this man be looking for both her and Rose?*

**Chapter 20**

A car engine rumbled down the street as a vehicle pulled to the front door, interrupting Cecile’s conversation with Lymen. Mrs. Roker’s driver got out of the car, walked to the other side and opened Mrs. Roker’s door for her. Lymen Smith glanced at Mrs. Roker and Cecile sensed he wanted to ask Mrs. Roker the same questions that he’d just asked her.

Quickly, her eyes scanned Lymen. He looked fairly well-dressed. He was probably a business man with some money in the bank. She doubted he was a policeman, but he had an “official” air about him. Cecile’s mom had taught her how to look at a person, assess them, come to a vague conclusion about who you were dealing with before making your move.

There was no way she was going to let Lymen speak to Mrs. Roker. She pulled him into the house, hoping to take him to the sitting room before Mrs. Roker entered, but, she moved too slow and her hands were shaking. Rubbing her forehead, she realized she had a headache, but, she had to get Lymen alone to talk to him.

Mrs. Roker walked up the steps, giving Lymen a curious glance before her eyes rested on Cecile. “What on earth? You look dreadful! Are you ill?” The large white feather on her church hat bobbed when she spoke, and Cecile swallowed, hoping Lymen would take the hint and follow her lead.

Ignoring Mrs. Roker’s question, she spoke. “I’m going down the street to the coffee shop for lunch. This is my friend Lymen. He’s taking me.”

Lymen shook Mrs. Roker’s hand, seemingly taking Cecile’s cue. “Glad to meet you,” he said.

Mrs. Roker nodded. “Likewise.”

Cecile’s heart fluttered when she realized that Lymen’s voice was deep, deep and masculine. She could get used to hearing a voice like that. Cecile sighed with relief when Mrs. Roker went up the steps, not asking any other questions. If Cecile were lucky, Mrs. Roker would be going to bed for her Sunday afternoon nap right now.

She pulled Lymen into the house, closing the door. Not giving him a chance to speak, she cleared her throat. “I’ll be right back. I can’t talk to you here, but, I can answer your questions. We can go to the coffee place down the street.”

Cecile rushed upstairs on her shaky legs, still feeling a bit ill. Her clothing and makeup supplies were meager, and it was hard to make herself presentable before going back downstairs. After dressing, she stared at herself in the mirror, wincing at the way her dowdy brown dress hung on her gaunt frame. Her eyes and lips were her most striking features – her entire face was beautiful, the most beautiful face in all of America, she was sure of it. If she wanted to entice Lymen, she had to enhance her large blue eyes and naturally cherry-red full lips.

After she’d applied her makeup, she winced at her sunken cheeks. There wasn’t much she could do about them. She recalled her mother telling her, while she was growing up, that life was a survival game. *Find a man to take care of you, Cecile. Make him happy, no matter what. If he stays happy, he’ll keep coming back. Don’t matter if he’s your husband or not. Don’t end up like me, old and having relations with poor men who can barely pay us with enough money to buy food.*

Once she was ready, she pulled a lacy shawl from her closet, hoping the item would detract from her hideous-looking dress. She then stepped out of her bedroom, noticing that Mrs. Roker’s door was open, indicating she’d probably already gone downstairs. Her mind had been so preoccupied that she hadn’t heard Mrs. Roker leave her bedroom. Cecile gasped, hoping Mrs. Roker was not downstairs talking to Lymen! She rushed downstairs just as Mrs. Roker came out of the kitchen. She glanced at Cecile, her brow furrowed with worry. “Geri was supposed to leave a loaf of bread and butter for us to enjoy with our lunch. I saw it on the counter before I left for church and now it’s gone. Do you know what happened to it?”

Cecile could sense Lymen standing in the foyer, watching her, listening to their conversation. She’d thought about lying to Mrs. Roker, but, for some reason, she sensed that it was not a good idea for Lymen to hear her lie. “I ate it.”

“You ate a slice of bread and butter? What about the rest of the loaf? Where is it?”

Cecile shook her head, realizing Mrs. Roker had misunderstood her. She toyed with the light, lace-patterned shawl around her shoulders. “I ate the whole loaf.”

Mrs. Roker’s dark eyes widened like saucers. “You ate an entire loaf of bread?”

Cecile nodded, rushing away from Mrs. Roker, not wanting to answer any more of her questions. She found Lymen where she’d left him, and she felt confident that Mrs. Roker had not conversed with him while he’d waited.

Lymen opened the door and they stepped outside. The hot sun beamed from the vivid blue sky and she blinked, realizing she had rarely been outside the house since she’d taken residence in New York. The blazing sun scorched her pale skin and she clutched her shawl in her bony fingers, hoping Lymen wouldn’t notice her shaky hands. She longed to go back into the rooming house, but, she didn’t want to talk to Lymen there with Mrs. Roker in the kitchen. Also, she wasn’t sure how long Jack’s and Rose’s wedding was supposed to last. What if they came back while Lymen was there?

“Before we go anyplace, we need to talk.” Lymen’s deep, mesmerizing voice swept over her, and Cecile again realized she loved to hear him speak.

“We’ll talk when we get to the coffee place. I promise.” She pointed toward the sky with her bony finger. “The sun’s really bothering me and I don’t want to stay out here longer than necessary.”

Lymen grunted, and Cecile figured he was not happy with what she’d just said. Recalling his earlier question about her illness, Cecile decided to remind him. “Remember, I don’t feel well.” She paused, toying with the fringe of her shawl. “Once we’ve chatted, I believe you’ll have all the answers to your questions.”

**\***

Lymen found himself intrigued, mesmerized, and suspicious of the woman strolling beside him on the busy sidewalk. Since assessing people was part of his job, he realized there was something physically wrong with her. She clutched her shawl, trying to control her shaky hands, probably hoping he wouldn’t notice how she shook.

But this stranger needed to realize that Lymen Smith noticed everything.

He stopped in front of the coffee place, one of the few businesses open on a Sunday, and opened the door for her. He sensed that this woman probably had information to share with him. They entered the busy establishment and found a table. A waitress soon approached, wanting their order. Her pen was poised, ready to write their order on her small pad of paper. Other waitresses bustled by and the cacophony of the voices of other diners echoed in the background.

He allowed the strange woman to order first. “I’ll have tea and blueberry scones with lots of clotted cream.”

Lymen ordered black coffee. Since he’d just eaten lunch, he didn’t order any food. Being a gentleman, he decided to patiently wait for their food to arrive before starting his inquisition. The waitress brought the food on a silver tray. The appealingly strange woman poured sugar into her tea, spilling some granules at the side since her hands shook. Waiting for her brew to cool, she attempted to slice one of the blueberry scones in half with a knife. She dropped the scone with her shaky hands, and she whimpered, as if frustrated.

The urge to help this woman swelled within him. “Let me help you,” he offered. Taking the knife, he sliced each of the large scones in half, length-wise. The enticing scents of fresh blueberries, bread, and cream now filled the air.

She glanced at him with her large cornflower-blue eyes. “Thank you,” she muttered, her face flushing. It appeared she was ashamed that she’d had trouble slicing the scone. He figured he really had to watch her – she might be shaking so badly because she was nervous – she might even attempt to lie to him.

He offered her the knife and she accepted it from his hand, their fingers touching. He jerked his hand back, shocked. Her fingers were as cold as ice! Again he wondered from what kind of illness she suffered. She clutched the knife in her bony fingers and slathered the clotted cream onto one of the huge blueberry scones. She ate hungrily, wolfing the food down as if she were afraid the food would disappear. Clotted cream clung to her full, cherry-red lips, and when she licked the cream away with her long, pink tongue, desire coursed through him like a red-hot cannon. He longed to kiss her luscious-looking mouth, but, he pushed the thought away, focusing on the task at hand.

He continued to stare at his lunch companion, mesmerized. Since she’d eaten, her hands no longer shook and since the scones and cream were gone, she sipped her tea slowly. He wondered about her skeletal body, why was she so thin? She was probably the skinniest woman he’d ever seen in his life. However, her face was striking. He could certainly get used to looking at her moist, ruby-red lips and large blue eyes. “I can help you, but, you’ll have to pay me.”

He jerked back, surprised at the words that had just tumbled from her mouth! He was the person doing this investigation, so he was in charge! “What did you say?” Perhaps he’d misheard her.

She ran her bony fingers through her hair, causing the sleeve of her loose-fitting dress to slide up, revealing a stick-like, skeletal arm. “I said I can give you the information you need, but, you’ll have to pay me. A twenty should do it.”

“You’ve got the nerve to bribe me and I don’t even know who you are.” Lymen struggled to keep his voice lowered, again realizing this woman might try and lie to him.

She pointed to the middle of the table. “Put the money right there. Once you’re satisfied with my answers, then I can take the money.”

He narrowed his eyes. “How will I know you’re telling me the truth?” He had the uncanny notion that he was playing a cat and mouse game with another private detective. His eyes swept over this woman from head to toe, noticing her long hair, her pretty face, and her gaunt frame. He knew of every private investigator in New York, but, he’d never come across anybody like this. What kind of game was she playing?

“Well?” Her appealing voice tinged with impatience. He sighed, not liking the fact that it appeared he was no longer in charge. He again thought of Cal Hockley and his offer of paying him double if he was able to find Rose Dewitt Bukater. Pulling his wallet from his pocket, he slapped twenty dollars in the middle of the black, wrought-iron table. She eyed the money with her piercing blue eyes before speaking. “You asked earlier if I knew Rose Dewitt Bukater and Cecile Black?”

He shook his head. “I did not. I asked if you knew Lily Jackson and Cecile Black.”

She chuckled, and the sound swept through him like warm honey. “No you didn’t, you said Rose Dewitt Bukater.”

Lymen winced. Had he mistakenly asked for Rose instead of Lily? He recalled when this woman had answered the door. He’d been taken aback by her beautiful, yet sickly, appearance. It was scary to think that his attraction to this woman had caused him to say the wrong thing when he’d been at the door.

From his knowledge of people using an alias, he’d figured that Rose was probably using the name of Lily Jackson. Reason being, Cal had mentioned her relationship with Jack Dawson. If Rose took on a new name, he could imagine her using part of Jack’s name in her new name, plus, Lily was the name of a flower, the same as Rose being the name of a flower. He shook his head, trying to clear his mind. He glanced at his lunch companion and realized she smirked, and he again felt himself get angry since it appeared he was no longer in charge of his own investigation!

He threw his hands up into the air, anxious to get started. They’d already wasted enough time with this woman wolfing down scones! In his entire life, he’d never seen a female eat with such reckless, unrestrained abandon! He again eyed his companion while she sipped her tea, attraction slamming into him again. Was she wild, un-restrained, behind closed doors? He shook the thought away, again forcing himself to focus on the task at hand. “Well, do you know Rose Dewitt Bukater, Lily Jackson, or Cecile Black?”

She nodded, setting her cup back onto her saucer. “I’m Cecile Black.”

He gasped. “Why didn’t you say that when you answered the door?”

She shrugged her bony shoulders. “I didn’t know what you wanted. I needed some time to think before I told you who I was.”

He narrowed his eyes. “Why? Do you have something to hide?”

She shook her head. “No, but Rose certainly does.” She gestured toward the twenty dollars. “I’m used to assessing people, finding secrets. Using secrets against others…” she leaned toward him, her loose gown gaping down, revealing a non-existent bosom. “I’ve even blackmailed people. It’s the way I was raised,” she whispered.

He blinked, shocked that she’d reveal something so personal to him, when she barely knew him. He was anxious to know more about this lady, but, first he had to find out about Rose, after all, that’s why Cal was paying him. “What is Rose Dewitt Bukater hiding?”

In her delightful, mesmerizing voice, Cecile talked about all that had happened to her since the Titanic survivors had docked in New York. She spoke of Rose’s costume as an old lady, their arrival at Mrs. Roker’s boarding house, Rose’s relationship with Jack, and then Cecile told how she, herself, had been raised with the habit of lurking. “In Mrs. Roker’s house, I lurked in corners, stairways, doors, looking for secrets.” She revealed that she’d been caught snooping in Rose’s room and she’d discovered the necklace. Lymen’s mouth dropped open and his heart skipped – Rose Dewitt Bukater was indeed a thief and she needed to be caught!

Cecile continued to speak while Lymen removed his notebook, taking notes about everything that she revealed. She even told that Rose was marrying Jack on that day, and she revealed the location of the wedding. “It’s a remote woods, but, it should be easy for you to find. She’s going to be moving in with Jack afterwards.” From her snooping around, listening, she’d even discovered where Jack and Rose would be living after the wedding. “Rose is coming back to the rooming house later to get her things. I heard her telling Geri and Mrs. Roker about it since Mrs. Roker might want to find another person to take Rose’s room. Also, Rose is pregnant with Jack’s baby. They had relations while on the Titanic and that’s when she got pregnant.”

Lymen stopped writing, shocked. He digested this news. He figured Cal would be mighty upset to discover that Rose was pregnant. He also figured he needed to settle the bill at the coffeehouse and rush over to Cal’s hotel to tell him about his findings. However, he’s agreed to give Cal a full accounting for both women – both Lily and Cecile. Since he could say that finding Cecile Black had been part of the investigation, he decided to extend this visit at the coffeehouse and find out more about Cecile Black’s background.

Cecile had been talking non-stop for close to two hours, telling him all about Rose’s activities, now it was time to focus on Cecile. “I’ve been hired to give Cal Hockley a partial dossier for both Cecile Black and Lily Jackson. Tell me, Miss Black, why were you traveling on the Titanic when you weren’t listed on the original passenger roster?”

She paused, her beautiful blue eyes widening, as if she were taken aback by the question. Lymen’s curiosity about this painfully thin, yet beautiful woman sprouted like a geyser. “Call me Cecile, please.” She paused again, closing her pretty eyes for a few seconds before speaking. “I wasn’t initially supposed to be traveling on the Titanic. Did you see the names Mr. Mark Baker and Mrs. Mary Baker on your roster?”

Lymen nodded, recalling that he’d told Cal that the Larsen brothers as well as the Baker couple had not boarded the ship, but they were listed on the roster.

She cleared her throat before speaking. “Mark Baker is a multi-millionaire. He’s a businessman with homes in several countries. I was his mistress. I lived in his house in France.”

“How long were you his mistress?”

She winced, and Lymen wondered if these questions were too painful for her to answer. “I was his mistress for two years. When his wife found out the first time, he didn’t visit me for six months but he still let me stay in his house in France. I loved living there because I was provided with my own staff. During his six-month absence, I worried he’d never return, or he’d throw me out, making me homeless. But, he showed up unexpectedly one day, and when he saw me, he was extremely upset.”

“Why?”

“Since I wasn’t sure when or if he’d return, I’d started eating again, abandoning my diet. I’d gained weight and he…” Cecile winced, tears gathering in her eyes. “He slapped me. He was disgusted with my weight gain. So, I started dieting again. He loved extremely thin women. I’m not sure why. As long as I was skinny, he loved me and he loved my body. He treated me like a princess as long as I stayed thin.” She sighed, shrugging her bony shoulders. “Plus, in spite of the way he was, I loved him.” She shivered, as if she’d caught a chill.

Lymen’s mouth dropped open. “You stayed with a man who treated you like that?”

Cecile nodded. “I loved him and I loved his money even more. I thought I could get him to change, maybe even change his mind about my starving myself. I thought he might leave his wife for me. I know it was stupid to think like that, but, it was what I thought.” She sighed. “I knew I couldn’t live like that forever. It was too hard only eating when I absolutely had to, just enough to avoid my headaches and my dizzy spells. While living like that, I had access to his money. I hoarded it whenever I could.”

Lymen stared at Cecile, again saddened by her gaunt frame. He thought about the way she’d wolfed down the scones and also recalled that she’d confessed to eating an entire loaf of bread with butter earlier. “So, why did you board the Titanic?” He asked again, for some reason desperate to know about Cecile’s background.

“Mrs. Baker found out that her husband had rekindled his affair with me. She got angry, threatened to kill herself if he didn’t get rid of me. She was highly emotional and extremely unstable. She refused to go on Titanic with her husband – they were supposed to be celebrating their anniversary and she said that the entire trip was a farce, so she refused to go. Mark had to get me out of France and back to the States since Mrs. Baker wanted me gone. She made him put his house in France on the market to be sold and she wanted proof that I was gone. He made me board the Titanic, and I stayed in the room originally assigned to Mr. and Mrs. Baker.” She bowed her head, staring at her clasped hands. “He promised he’d meet up with me after I docked. Supposedly he’d arranged for me to stay in a hotel. Once the Carpathia landed, I couldn’t find record of any arrangements made in the hotel, plus, I didn’t have the funds with me to pay. I’d wondered if he’d lied and had abandoned me, but, I stayed on my diet, hoping he’d return.” She swallowed, continuing to stare at her hands. “I wrote to him, letting him know that I was staying at Mrs. Roker’s. He sent me a letter back, stating that he never wanted to see me again and he sent me a check.”

“What about the money in France that you’d hoarded?”

“He accessed my bank account and closed it.” She looked up at him, her eyes gleaming with unshed tears. “The check he sent me had my hoarded funds, plus some extra. So, I’m all alone now, so I don’t have to diet any longer.”

Lymen winced, repulsed by the story. He stared at Cecile. Was she mentally stable? “Why did you put up with him?”

She blinked, then she looked at Lymen as if he were an idiot. “I told you, I loved him plus he’s rich. Money is everything…it’s power. Just being with somebody with that much wealth…have you ever been poor Mr. Smith?”

He jerked back, surprised at the question. “My parents weren’t rich.”

She shook her head. “I’m talking about being poor. My mother washed people’s clothes for a living. Her hands were cracked and red all the time. She had six children and none of us knew our fathers. She was also a prostitute, turning tricks to make extra money to feed us. She also sometimes bribed her johns – ensuring she didn’t tell their wives about the sexual encounters. In spite of doing all of that, there was never enough money. I was hungry a lot, that’s why it was possible for me to keep that strict diet as a mistress – I’d grown up hungry and extremely thin.” She shook her head. “I put up with him as his mistress, but, I did it for the money. I knew I couldn’t do it forever, but, I was hoping something would happen to make my situation better. I knew I wasn’t going to end up like my mother – dead with only two cents in her pocket.”

Lymen grunted, settling back in his chair. “Might I offer you some advice?” Cecile barely nodded, so, Lymen continued. “In my work as a private investigator, I’ve dealt with wives looking for evidence about their cheating spouses. I can tell you this, the husband almost never leaves his wife for his mistress.” He shook his head. “It just doesn’t happen. I wished more mistresses would understand this.”

She nodded, indicating she’d heard his advice. She took a sip of her tea, which had probably grown cold. She then placed her cup back into her saucer, lifted the twenty dollars from the table and leaned toward him, batting her long eyelashes, tugging her dress down to slip the money into her non-existent bosom. Her luscious lips curved into a smile and she placed her bony hand over his. Her frigid, cold fingers dug into his skin, making him tense. Why were her hands so cold? “So, Lymen Smith, are you married?”

**Chapter 21**

“Oh, Jack, I’m having the time of my life!” Jack grinned as he took both of Rose’s hands into his.

“I’m glad you’re having a good time!” Still clutching her hands, he turned toward the small band of musicians. “Hey could you speed up the music?”

Soon, the small band began playing a jig and Jack whooped and hollered. Their hands still joined, him and Rose turned round and round in a circle. Their wedding guests clapped, stomped and swayed to the music. Rose grinned while they spun, round and round, he never took his eyes away from her amazing face. The massive trees in the secluded woods provided some protection against the scorching hot sun. Rose’s cheeks were flushed, and he wasn’t sure if it was the heat or the wedding excitement that was causing her to blush. “Oh, Jack,” she breathed deeply while they spun. “I have to stop. I’m out of breath.”

They crashed to a halt, and Jack’s body still felt like it was spinning. He looked up at the canopy of brilliant green leaves and it appeared that the tree was still spinning.

“Hey, you two!” Thelma spoke, holding a huge blanket in her arms, Paul coming up behind her. “You two need to sit down and rest for a while on this blanket. We do have a few chairs but the elderly people are using those. Also, we don’t want Rose to get any dirt on her borrowed dress.”

Grateful, Rose and Jack fell onto the blanket, out of breath. Paul shook Jack’s hand. “Congratulations. She’s wonderful, Jack.”

Jack grinned. “Thanks, Paul.” He presented them with two ice-cold bottles of Coke. “We placed some bottles of soda in a secluded place in the river to keep them cold. Drink up. We’ll have the food ready in a minute.”

Rose’s beautiful green eyes widened with delight. “You mean there’s food, too?”

Paul nodded, grinning. “Yes. We have a whole feast prepared. So you two just sit back and relax and enjoy yourselves. Thelma and I will bring your plates in a minute.”

Jack popped the tops off their sodas and gave Rose’s soda back to her. He tipped the glass bottle back and drank, enjoying the cold, sweet fizz that traveled down his parched throat. Rose drank her soda thirstily, watching their wedding guests having a good time. “Oh, Jack. I still can’t believe that we’re married.”

He took her hand, toying with her fingers. “Well, I can believe it. You’re stuck with me, now.” He leaned his head toward hers, kissing her soft, ruby-red lips. He then brushed his fingers over her fiery red hair, worry again consuming him.

“Jack, what’s wrong? It’s our wedding day and it’s not the time to be worried about something.”

Jack blinked, looking around the forest. Although the band still played, many of the guests had stopped dancing, probably tired from all of the movement. A light breeze blew, rustling the leaves on the large oak trees. He took a deep breath, tilted his head toward the sky, enjoying the light wind. Visions of Rose whimpering and crying invaded his mind and he gasped, his heart skipping a beat.

Rose dropped her empty soda bottle onto the ground, grabbing his hand. “Jack, what’s wrong? You look like you’ve just seen a ghost.”

Rose’s pretty brow furrowed with worry, and Jack realized there was no way he could share his vision with her. It was possible that he was still paranoid because of all they’d been through with the Titanic sinking. Maybe he was so happy today that it was hard for him to accept the Lord’s blessing of a wonderful wife, a baby, as well as the most wonderful church family he’d ever seen in his life.

Taking his hand, he cupped Rose’s face, stroking her soft skin. She leaned into his hand, smiling with pleasure, obviously enjoying his touch. He swallowed, deciding to tell her what he could without causing her undue worry. “I just love you so much. This is the most joyous, most happiest day of my life, and….”

She blinked, her face still comfortably snuggled in his hand. “And,” she prompted.

“And, I just don’t want anything bad to happen to you. I don’t want you to suffer or get hurt or anything.”

Rose grinned, taking his hand into hers. “Jack, you worry too much. Nothing’s going to happen to me.”

He shrugged, still bothered that he could not shrug the niggling feeling away. “I can’t help worrying about you, Rose. You’re my wife and I love you.”

“Here we go.” Paul’s deep voice interrupted their conversation. Paul and Thelma presented them with two heaping plates of food. Jack was amazed that the church members had gone through the trouble of bringing food along. There was golden fried chicken, ham sandwiches, and pickles. “Don’t forget to save room for the watermelon and the cake,” Paul announced.

Paul and Thelma left them alone to enjoy their food. Jack relished the salty ham, the soft yeasty bread and the moist, delicious chicken. After they’d eaten, the church ladies whisked Rose away to touch up her makeup. When they returned, Jack spotted a white man coming toward them, holding a sketch pad and pencils. “Who is that?” asked Jack.

Thelma responded, Rose standing behind her. “That’s a sketch artist. We figured you wanted a sketch of you and your new bride. Just stand still and pose. We hired him to do a few sketches of the two of you.”

Jack posed with his new wife, feeling weird. Since he was an artist, he was used to being the one doing the sketches. Since he’d discovered his artistic talent, Jack couldn’t recall ever having anybody to sketch his picture before. The artist proved quick and about an hour later, Jack and Rose were presented with three professional sketches encased in a leather binder. Jack studied the drawings, pleased with the talent of the artist. He’d captured the happy sparkle in Rose’s eyes and he’d even captured the detail of the roses etched into Rose’s dress. Jack appeared happy and carefree in the sketches. There was one sketch with him and Rose’s faces close up. The look of adoration they had for one another was apparent in the drawing.

After admiring the sketches, they enjoyed huge slices of ruby red watermelon and Rose expertly cut into the small white vanilla cake. They served the cake alongside the watermelon. Jack bit into his watermelon slice, enjoying the icy cold sweetness of the fruit. While Rose dropped morsels of cake into her pretty mouth, Jack shuddered, again sensing that something was wrong. He looked away from Rose, not wanting her to see his worried expression. *Lord, what’s wrong with me? Why am I having a hard time enjoying my wedding day?*

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I tossed the last bite of cake into her mouth, enjoying the moist sweetness of the vanilla-flavored treat. Jack looked away from me, staring off into the distance, probably not wanting me to see his face. However, before he turned away, I’d seen the look of worry cross his handsome features. *Lord, what’s wrong with my new husband? Why is he so worried?*

I knew Jack loved me and being loved by Jack Dawson filled me with a warm, euphoric, wonderful feeling. Just being with Jack made me feel happy, carefree, alive…I loved his man so much that it ached, it was a wonderful ache right in the core of my being. This man was a part of me and I needed to figure out why he was so worried. Was he still upset about Cal, afraid he’d shatter our happiness?

As I set my empty cake plate aside, I thought about The Heart Of The Ocean, realizing that Jack was probably worried about that necklace. I was worried about it too. After all, if we returned the necklace to Cal, he’d just have Jack falsely arrested for theft. I was sure of it. Visions of Jack going to prison for a crime he didn’t commit filled my mind and I whimpered. Jack heard me, and he turned to look at me, his beautiful blue-gray eyes full of worry. “Honey, what’s wrong?”

I shook my head, still wondering what I should tell Jack. He stood up and offered me his hand, helping me to stand and move away from our blanket. “Rose, I think we need to talk. You’re my wife now, and we need to be honest with each other about everything, okay?”

I sighed, nodding. We walked further into the woods, finding a secluded rock near the rushing river. The hot sun shined upon the moving water, creating wonderful sparkles of light. I gazed at the pretty water, spotting a few minnows rushing in the current. We sat on the huge rock and Jack took me into his arms and his mouth pressed against mine. We kissed long and hard, and I enjoyed the taste, smell, and presence of Jack Dawson. We finally broke our kiss and Jack took his wonderful hands and massaged my stomach. My tummy fluttered with excitement and my heart pounded.

His mouth pressed against my ear and he spoke. “I can’t wait to put my hands on you tonight.” His warm breath tickled my ear, and I whimpered with delight, turning around to face him.

“Oh, Jack.”

He took my hand into his, toying with my fingers, pressing his wonderful lips against my forehead. “Rose, what’s the matter?”

I sighed. “I’m still worried about Cal’s necklace. What if he tries to make you go to prison for stealing it?” I glanced down at the rushing river. “What if he tries to kill you?” I moaned. “Oh, Jack, we’ve been through so much already, I just don’t know what I’d do if I lost you.” I swallowed, still trying to put my feelings into words. “I’d die if I lost you,” I whispered.

“Rose, you’re strong. Whatever happens, we’ll get through it. Remember, we have to rely on our faith in God.” I finally nodded, agreeing with him. My faith in the Lord was still weak, but, I was working on strengthening my faith. Hopefully, we could pray away these bad feelings and nothing awful would happen to us.

“Jack, why are you worried? I feel as if there’s something you’re not telling me.”

My husband winced, holding me tighter in his arms. “I feel like you’re going to be hurt. Rose, I don’t want anything bad to happen to you.”

“I guess your faith is weak, too, Jack. You shouldn’t worry about me. We need to pray about what we’re feeling. We also just need to enjoy one another’s company right now, be together as husband and wife. We’ve worked hard to be together and I’m sure the Lord would want us to enjoy each another.”

Jack nodded, and my heart skipped a beat while he leaned his head closer to mine and he kissed me.

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Cal stood at the edge of the secluded woods. Using Lymen’s high-powered binoculars, he watched Jack and Rose kiss for so long that he wondered when they would come up for air. Just seeing Rose’s creamy white body in another man’s arms made him flinch. Anger pierced through him like red-hot arrows. He shook with unrestrained rage before Lymen spoke, interrupting his spell of anger. “So, are you satisfied?”

Cal nodded, still watching, his anger again deepening. Nobody made a fool out of him, nobody. After the Titanic sunk, and the Carpathia landed in New York, he’d been the subject of stares as well as ridicule from his acquaintances. Most now knew that Rose had been on the Carpathia and that their marriage never took place. The shame swept over him, making him feel sick. When Rose and Jack finally ended their kiss, Cal scanned the surrounding area, noting the ton of Blacks dancing and singing nearby. “What on earth?” he gasped, shocked.

“What is it?” asked Lymen.

“All those nig—”

“Don’t say that dreadful word,” Lymen said, his mouth set in a tense line. “I told you that Jack and Rose had been attending a Black church.”

Cal gasped when Jack took Rose’s hand, guiding her away from the rock and toward the crowd of Blacks. Anger surged through him as fast as a speeding train when one of the Blacks took Rose’s milky white hand into his and all of them started dancing in a circle, in rhythm to the five-piece band. Amidst the crowd of Blacks, the only white person he saw besides Jack and Rose was a tall, bulky, muscular man, standing in the midst, and he was holding hands with a Black woman, and they kissed!

Cal shook his head. Disgraceful! Very disgraceful!

“So, I found Rose Dewitt Bukater, as you’ve hired me to do.” Lymen held his hand out, ready to be paid. After he’d had lunch with Cecile in the coffeehouse, he’d hurried over to Cal’s hotel and led him to the secluded woods. Now, he was glad that he’d made Cecile’s acquaintance that day.

Grumbling, Cal removed his billfold, quickly counting out the money to give to Lymen. Lymen accepted the cash, wadding it up and placing it into his pocket. “Well, I’m leaving right now, unless you needed me for anything else?”

Cal shook his head. “I’m going to borrow your binoculars. I promise to return them to your office in the morning.” Cal planned on watching the rest of the wedding celebration, and then he needed to plan on how he needed to make Rose pay for making a fool out of him. She didn’t seem to understand that Cal Hockley always won. Always…

**Chapter 22**

I stared at Jack’s handsome face while he shoveled the scrambled eggs I’d made into his mouth. I winced, realizing my husband was trying not to spit out my blackened scrambled eggs. He took a sip of coffee and spit it out. “Rose…”

Tears welled in my eyes, and I started blubbering. Jack reached over, pulling me into his strong arms, forcing me to sit on his lap. “Ah, Rose, don’t cry.”

My pregnancy had gotten me so emotionally wound up that I didn’t know what to do with myself. I cried so easily…I never used to cry this much, not even when Cal was acting like a stupid, dominating asshole! Jack stroked my stomach with his mesmerizing hands, calming me down, making me think about the amazing night we’d spent together. I closed my eyes, recalling the hot, passionate way Jack Dawson had made love to me the night before. My pale skin flushed, and Jack chuckled. “Are you thinking about last night?”

My sadness soon evaporated and I eventually smiled, before spotting his plate of half-eaten, burnt scrambled eggs. My smile disappeared as I thought about my problem. I couldn’t even make decent breakfast for my new husband before he went to the docks to work!

After our wedding the previous day, Jack and I had gone back to Mrs. Roker’s so that I could get my things. Cecile was lurking in the hallway, wearing her ugly brown dress and she had a lacy shawl draped around her bony shoulders. I’d never seen her wear that shawl before and I’d wondered if she’d stolen the item. While I went up to my room, Cecile had stared at me. She even looked like she wanted to say something to me, but, I ignored her. Miranda had given me a brief hug, wishing me luck on my new marriage. I think Miranda was glad to see me leave since she now had the bedroom to herself.

Today, Jack had to go to the docks and take to the streets of New York to do his signature sketches so that he could bring home lots of dimes to put food on our meager table. After our hot, passionate lovemaking the night before, we’d sat up talking for a long time, planning our future. Jack had sketched me in the nude last night and when he signed his drawing, he’d signed his sketch by placing the date, and his initials. He revealed that he’d started drawing a small cross beside his signature – a symbol of his faith. He’d recently started doing this on all of his sketches.

He’d even mentioned to me that he was thinking about offering art lessons to children to bring in more money. He’d even suggested that if he could get the right connections, he could offer his lessons to the wealthy. I thought about people I knew from my former circles. Could I try and find some wealthy people, people whom may be connected to my previous circles, here in New York, hoping they’d hire Jack?

I sighed, too upset to think about that right now. Jack hated his breakfast and we didn’t have a lot of money to spend on extra food. I glanced around our place, not pleased with our surroundings. I was living in a one-room unit. The bathroom was down the hall and we shared it with the other families on the floor. The curtains were worn, tattered, with holes. The wooden floor was scarred from years of use. There was an oven in the kitchen, but, I had no idea how to use it. For the first time in my life I’d made scrambled eggs and they’d turned out lousy.

I whimpered, getting up, going back to the stove. I lifted the tattered towel covering a bowl and saw my terrible-looking mass of dough. Jack came into the kitchen behind me, staring at the white, ugly, doughy mass. “What’s that?” he asked, chuckling.

I gasped. “Don’t laugh at me! I wanted to have some bread to serve with your breakfast this morning.” I shook my head. “When I was a girl, and I spent more time in the kitchen with the cook, I recall her making dough and covering it with a towel. In a few hours, it always rose into a loaf and she’d bake it into a loaf of bread.”

Jack opened his mouth and laughed, his blue-green eyes twinkling. “Honey, you need to put yeast in your dough.”

I turned away, ashamed. Jack stopped laughing, pulled me into his arms, and kissed my flushed cheek. “Honey, I’ve gotta go. We can talk about your cooking later.” Taking his hand, he grabbed my chin, forcing me to look into his eyes. “You know I love you, right?”

I nodded. “I love you, too,” I whispered. I watched him as he gathered his art supplies. “I’m going back to Mrs. Roker’s today. I’m sure Geri can teach me how to cook.”

Jack winced, frowning. “Rose, I don’t want you to leave our place. You make sure you lock that door after I leave and don’t let anybody in here.”

I gasped. “Why not?”

He sighed, facing the wall, not speaking.

I walked toward him, touching his shoulder. “Are you still worried?”

He stood there for a few minutes before he turned around to face me. The tortured look on his face made me pause. “Rose, I don’t want anything bad to happen to you. Just stay here for the next few days so that I can figure out what we need to do to protect you.”

I blinked, confused. “Protect me? Protect me from what? Are you referring to Cal?”

“I don’t know. I’m so worried that something will happen to you.”

“I will only visit with Geri for a few minutes—”

“NO!” His voice resounded in our small apartment. Jack’s voice was so loud that I’m sure it traveled through the walls and that our neighbors could hear him. Not giving me time to object, he gave me a quick kiss before grabbing his things and rushing out the door.

 Taking a deep breath, I walked to the door, locking it as Jack had suggested. I’d spoken to Pastor Michael during our wedding reception and he’d reminded me that I needed to love, honor, and obey my husband.

I again stared at the mass of blackened scrambled eggs on Jack’s plate. I wanted to love, honor and obey Jack, but, I’m sure Jack didn’t want me to waste the meager funds we had on food that could not be eaten.

I sat at the table, my shoulders hunched with dread. There was no way that I could stay in this apartment all day and not do something to learn how to cook. I just sat at the table, thinking, waiting, rubbing my pregnant stomach. After about an hour, I stood up, making my decision. I was going to go to Mrs. Roker’s to visit Geri. Hopefully, she could show me what I needed to do make a decent meal for my husband. After all, if I kept burning food like I’d done this morning, then, Jack and I would end up starving to death!

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In my neat, fancy handwriting, I copied recipes from Geri’s collection. Mrs. Roker’s kitchen was warm, a bit too warm for me, but, I withstood the heat so that I could get my information. Geri was baking bread that day, and she’d shown me what to do to make a loaf. I gazed around the familiar kitchen, already feeling as if being here with Geri was like being in my second home. Geri spoke, kneading dough. “You know, Jack is right, you need to put yeast into your dough. That’ll make it rise.”

I nodded, concentrating on copying the recipes down. My time was limited because I had to get back before Jack got home for dinner. I couldn’t let him know that I’d disobeyed him and left the apartment to come and see Geri. “What do I do about his scrambled eggs?”

Geri grunted. “Don’t turn your heat up so high. Cook ‘em slowly. If I wasn’t kneading bread right now, I’d show you. Try and practice the eggs when he’s gone. After you’ve perfected your eggs, then you can start cooking scrambled eggs for him. Give him some hard boiled eggs tomorrow for breakfast, that way, at least you won’t burn them. It’s kinda hard to mess up a hard-boiled egg.”

I watched Geri put the bread into the oven before starting her other dinner preparations, chopping up vegetables, preparing the meat. I had so much to learn! I also had no idea about the prices of things! Could Jack and I even afford to buy meat? The magnitude of what I needed to learn rushed through me, making me want to just sit back and cry. But, I had to be strong and embrace this new way of life!

I gathered my papers, pleased that I’d at least gotten a head start on finding some recipes. I spoke, confiding to Geri about Jack’s mood that morning. She immediately stopped chopping vegetables, turning to face me, her brown eyes laced with worry. “Rose, if Jack told you not to come over here then you should’ve stayed home.”

“But—”

 “No excuses. You need to obey your husband. Now, why don’t you hurry back to your place? I don’t want you getting into trouble. Since I have your address, I might have time to come to your place within the next day or so while on my way home to give you some more cooking lessons.”

 “Okay.” I knew there was no point in arguing with her. I honestly didn’t see what the big deal was. After all, couldn’t Geri and Jack see that I was just trying to help my household by learning to cook? Jack was being paranoid and I didn’t like it one bit! After stuffing the papers and pencil into my small satchel, I rushed from the kitchen and spotted Cecile lurking outside the kitchen. From the guilty look on her face, I figured she’d been listening to my conversation with Geri.

 It’d been a trying day. I’d burnt the eggs, Jack had yelled at me, Geri was mad at me for disobeying Jack…and now Cecile was lurking outside the kitchen, listening to my private conversation! I was so wound up that I felt like slapping Cecile’s face. I stomped toward her, angry. “You need to stop listening to other people’s conversations. Remember when Miranda slapped you? That’s what I feel like doing to you right now!” I balled my hands into fists, trying to calm down. From Miranda’s attack, I knew Cecile was weak, barely having the strength to fight back since she hardly ate.

Cecile’s large blue eyes widened with fright and she stepped away from me. I closed my eyes, trying to calm down. *L*or*d, help me with this anger.* I opened my eyes and Cecile was still there, as if she were afraid to move. I blinked, looking at her from head to toe. I lowered my voice. “Why are you like this? Why do you lurk, listening, breaking into people’s rooms? Why are you so skinny? Why are you afraid to eat?”

 Cecile shook her head, and shocked coursed through my system when she spoke. “I was not listening. I was going to the kitchen to get a glass of water.”

I shook my head. “No, you were listening to my private conversation with Geri. You look guilty as sin.” I turned away, about to leave, and then I decided to say something else, so I turned toward her again. “You also lie about what you are doing. Why?” Cecile remained mute, rooted in the same position. I softened my voice, sensing the Lord working through me as my anger evaporated like a disappearing mist. “You act as if you hate everybody in this house and we’ve never done anything bad to you. You invade our privacy, steal, lie…then you act like you’re above us. You act as if you’re the queen of this house and that you’re too high and mighty to speak to the rest of us. If you’re really better than the rest of us, if you think so highly of yourself, then,” I paused, not sure if I should be truthful, but, I decided it was best to be honest. “If you’re so grand, then, why are you trying to kill yourself?” She gasped, but, I continued speaking, staring at her gaunt frame. Her bony shoulders tensed while I spoke. “You look half-dead right now. Cecile, don’t do this to yourself.” I touched her hand, and I immediately pulled away. “Why are you so cold?” I murmured. Her skin was as cold as ice!

Recalling Jack’s earlier tirade, I left before Cecile had a chance to respond. I didn’t even know if I’d ever see her again since Geri had told me that she might come to my place the next time she gave me cooking lessons.

I slammed the front door behind me, sighing. I needed to hurry back to my small apartment. I wasn’t sure what time Jack usually arrived home, but, I wanted to give him something edible to eat for dinner. Anxious to get home, I found a back alley that would lead me to our apartment much quicker than taking the main road. I ran as fast as I could, clutching my satchel. The sun shined above, causing me to sweat. I needed to hurry home, drink a nice, cold glass of water, before starting Jack’s dinner.

Footsteps pounded behind me, and I frowned, too much in a hurry to look, figuring somebody else was rushing home, too. I tried to run faster, and the footsteps behind me got faster also. A heavy body landed on top of me, slamming me into the ground. Fingers dug into my shoulders and I opened my mouth to scream, but, a cloth soon covered my nose and mouth. An acid-like scent invaded my mouth and nostrils. My attacker grabbed my hair, jerking my head back, before I passed out.

**Chapter 23**

I woke up, my eyes fluttering open. I was in a room, a white room with one window. I sat upright on a bed, but my hands were in handcuffs, and my feet were also bound in cuffs. I swallowed. I was so thirsty. The acrid scent of cigarette smoke was coming from somewhere. Closing my eyes again, I opened my mouth, about to scream, when a familiar voice interrupted my actions. “Don’t even try it. Nobody’s going to hear you anyway since we’re out in the middle of nowhere.”

Cal Hockley stepped into the room. He carried a drink in one hand and he was smoking a cigarette in another. He gave me a slow, wicked smile, his perfectly-shaped eyebrows raised with glee. He put the drink on a small table, coming toward me. He then reached his hand into his pocket and pulled out The Heart Of The Ocean!

I gasped. If Cal had the necklace, then that must’ve meant that he’d been to our apartment! “Where’s Jack,” I gasped.

“Where do you think he is? I killed him. I hired somebody to put a bullet into his head. NOBODY steals from me, Rose, NOBODY.”

I whimpered, not able to stop my tears from falling. Gasping, I sat there, thinking, crying. Memories rushed into my brain, so fast and furious that I felt like I was losing my mind. I recalled the first time I spotted Jack. He’d been blatantly staring at me from the deck below. I thought about us sharing dinner together in the first class dining area, our partying below deck, drinking, dancing…he’d saved me, literally. I blinked, processing what Cal had just claimed. Jack and I were soul mates. I loved him with all my heart.

Taking a deep breath, I stopped sobbing, trying to remain calm. Cal was lying. Deep in my heart, I sensed that Jack was still alive. There was no way that he could be dead. *Lord, help me.* Closing my eyes, I prayed as hard as I could. I was concentrating so hard, that I even started mumbling Bible verses aloud. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he leadeth me..”

Cal rushed toward me, grabbing my hair, forcing me to open my eyes. He backhanded me across the face, again and again. White hot pain flushed against my soft, pale skin. I ground my teeth together, refusing to cry out. I sniffed, my green eyes shooting sparks of anger when I looked at Cal. His dark eyes appeared dazed and crazy. He appeared to be a lunatic, and he was so angry that he shook. Drool spilled down the side of his mouth and I smelled alcohol on his breath. “Stop that religious drivel! I know you and your Jack have been going to church with all those nig—”

“Don’t say that word!”

He backhanded me again. I winced at the white hot pain, but refused to cry out. “I will say whatever I please, Rose. Remember, I always win. Jack Dawson is the scum of the earth and he’s dead now. Dead! He’s dead because he stole two things from me,” he paused, releasing my hair, and my head banged against the wall when he released me. “While on the Titanic, he stole my fiancée, and he also stole my gift to my fiancée, The Heart Of The Ocean. Do you realize how much that necklace cost me?”

I gritted my teeth, upset. I scanned the room before again noting my shackled hands and feet. Cal chuckled. “I know you, Rose. You’re looking for a way to escape. But let me tell you something. Nobody knows where we are…NOBODY.” He pulled a gun from his pocket and I whimpered, wondering if he was going to shoot me. He leaned over me, placed the gun on the table, next to his drink, and he then placed his hands at the top of my dress, right over my bosom. He then pulled, ripping my cheap dress from my body. Drooling, his crazed expression got even worse when he saw me in my brazier. He stroked his fingers over my pale, smooth skin, and I ground my teeth, trying hard not to show emotion from his sinister touch. “YOU ARE MINE!”

I looked away from this lunatic, toward the white wall, while he continued to touch me. *Lord help me, lord help me, lord save me.* He ran his fingers over my pudgy stomach, mumbling. “I ought to take a knife and cut this baby right out of you. I should cut this bastard right out of you right now!”

“Oh, dear God in heaven,” I cried.

“STOP IT! STOP SAYING THAT GOD MESS!”

Cal snapped, totally losing it! He grabbed his gun and cracked it against my head. I whimpered, no longer able to stop my cries. Something soft, warm and sticky ran down my temple and I realized it was blood. Feeling light-headed, I passed out again.

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Jack stopped sketching, his head snapping up. Something was wrong with Rose, he could feel it! *Lord, help me.* The wind blew on the docks and the woman he was sketching appeared impatient, fidgeting. “Why did you stop?”

“I’ve gotta go.” He slammed his sketch book closed, began gathering his pencils.

“But you can’t leave. You’re not done with my sketch.”

Jack dropped the half-finished sketch on the ground. “I’ve gotta go.”

He rushed from the dock, running as fast as his legs would carry him. Rushing past buildings, he barely noticed the people on the street, roughly pushing people aside, not bothering to be polite. Jack continued to push and kick people aside on the crowded New York sidewalk as he sprinted toward his apartment. He heard upset murmurings from the crowd about his brash behavior, but, he didn’t care. Something was wrong with Rose. He needed to rush home and see if she was okay. His feet pounded up the steps, arriving at their apartment door. He lifted his key from his pocket when he realized their apartment door was ajar!

Pushing the door open, he stared at their ransacked apartment, shocked! His sketches had been tossed around the apartment like unwanted garbage. Their meager belongings were left strewn around the apartment, clothes and socks littered the floor and all of the drawers had been opened. Breathing heavily, he raced to their bed, found Rose’s satchel underneath. He grabbed the tattered sack, emptied the contents onto the bed, discovering that The Heart Of The Ocean was gone! A cream-colored envelope was nestled at the bottom of the sack. He ripped the envelope open, and scanned the hand-written note.

*I always win, Jack. I have what’s rightfully mine. If you call the authorities, I will slice her creamy white neck with a knife and I’ll kill your baby.*

Jack fisted the note in his hand, anger and sadness slicing through him like a red-hot knife. He stood in the middle of the room, tears burning a path down his cheeks. Stunned, he was unsure of what he should do. He needed to find Rose! Cursing, he looked at the note again. Even though the note was unsigned, he knew it was written by Caledon Hockley. He knew Cal had her, and he knew that Cal stopped at nothing to get what he wanted. He’d kill Rose if he got mad enough. After all, Cal had already tried to kill them while they were on the Titanic.

“Lord, help me!” Unable to control himself, he opened his mouth and howled, releasing his rage, anger and torment.

He then rushed out of his apartment, not even bothering to lock the door. He ran down the stairs and out onto the street. He stared at people rushing by, and several people stared at him, pointing. He figured he looked a mess with tears burning down his cheeks, but, he had to find Rose! He thought about Pastor Michael, the best friend he had in New York. He figured Pastor Michael would know what to do.

Running as fast as he could, he rushed in the direction of Pastor Michael’s apartment. Once he arrived, he banged on the door. “Pastor Michael!” He continued to yell the pastor’s name, banging on the door as hard as he could. Darkness was descending, and his worries about Rose increased.

Pastor Michael opened the door. “Jack, what in the world is the matter with you?”

Not responding, Jack rushed in and spotted Thelma and Paul sitting in the living room playing a board game. He’d run so fast and so hard that his breathing was labored, so, he dropped into a chair. Thelma rushed over to him. “Jack, what on earth is wrong?”

“Thelma, go and get him some water and bring him a towel,” Pastor Michael commanded. Thelma rushed to do her stepfather’s bidding, and seconds later, she offered Jack the water. When he reached for it, Cal’s note dropped from his hand. “What’s this?” asked Pastor Michael. Michael picked the note up off the floor, scanning it.

Jack guzzled the water before speaking. “It’s Cal Hockley, he’s got Rose!” His skin slick with sweat, he wiped the sweat away with the towel that Thelma had given to him.

Paul took the note from Pastor Michael, reading it. “Jack, where do you think he’s taken her?”

Jack glared at Paul. “I don’t know! If I knew where they were I wouldn’t be here right now. I’d be over there trying to save Rose.” He took a deep breath. “Pastor, I’m afraid he’s going to kill Rose. He tried to kill us while we were on the Titanic. He’s crazy and he’ll stop at nothing to get what he wants.”

Thelma whimpered, dropping into a chair. “Dear God in heaven, help us.”

In a rushed voice, Jack reminded them that he’d been worrying over the last few days about Rose. “I told her not to leave the apartment this morning and she promised me she wouldn’t leave.”

Pastor Michael spoke. “Are you sure she promised you that, Jack? Rose seems to have a strong mind of her own and if she wanted to leave the apartment, she may have done that.” Jack blinked, thinking hard about what had happened that morning. He’d commanded Rose not to leave the apartment, but, she’d never agreed to obey his request. How could he have been so stupid, thinking Rose would actually obey him?

Pastor Michael continued to share his opinion. “When Cal came to your place today, maybe Rose wasn’t even there.” Jack sighed, hoping and silently praying the pastor was right. “Is there any particular place that she wanted to go today?”

“She said she wanted to go to Mrs. Roker’s rooming house so that Geri could give her cooking lessons.”

Pastor Michael stood. “Hold on.” He left the room and returned a few minutes later with two guns. “Here’s a revolver. Do you know how to shoot?”

Jack nodded, accepting the gun, shocked that Pastor Michael had weapons. The pastor took charge. “Paul, I want you to come with us. Thelma, I want you to gather all of the church members that live in our apartment building and start praying. I have a feeling that it’s going to be a long night.”

“Where are we going?” asked Paul.

“We’re going to start by going to Mrs. Roker’s. I don’t feel comfortable involving the authorities because of Cal’s note. If he’s as crazy as Jack says, there’s no telling what he’ll do to Rose if he finds out the police are involved.”

Jack, Michael, and Paul rushed out of the apartment, down the steps, and around the corner to where Pastor Michael kept his horse and wagon. After he’d hitched the horse to the wagon, they scrambled aboard, and Michael flicked the reins and they rushed down the street. Several minutes later, they pulled in front of Mrs. Roker’s house. Michael had barely stopped before Jack rushed from the wagon, scrambled up the steps and banged on the door. “Open up!”

“Jack, calm down,” advised Pastor Michael as he joined him at the door. “They might not open if they think you’re crazy.”

Mrs. Roker opened the door. “Jack, what on earth are you doing here?”

“Was Rose here earlier visiting Geri?”

“I don’t know. I was gone all day, and Geri’s already left. What’s this about?”

Ignoring Mrs. Roker, Jack glanced inside the house, looked up the steps and spotted Cecile standing at the top of the stairs, staring at them. He recalled how she’d lurked, hiding, listening to private conversations, plus, she’d snuck into Rose’s bedroom. This woman was nothing but trouble, but, he figured she may at least know if Rose had been here earlier. He rushed up the stairs and Cecile’s large blue eyes widened. “Was Rose here earlier?”

Cecile didn’t speak, looking toward the wall.

“WAS ROSE HERE EARLIER? ANSWER ME?”

Mrs. Roker was soon beside Jack. “Young man, stop yelling and badgering my tenant. If you don’t, I’m calling the police.”

Jack opened his mouth and howled, exasperated. “Rose is missing. She’s been abducted and if I call the authorities the abductor is threatening to kill her.”

“Good heavens!” Mrs. Roker placed her shaky hand over her mouth. “Are you sure?”

Jack shoved the note to Mrs. Roker so that she could read it. Cecile remained silent, her back against the wall. She wore a nightgown over her bony frame and she’d gotten paler since he’d arrived. A feeling of dread and apprehension coursed through Jack. Cecile’s hands were shaking, and she looked like a caged animal, wanting to escape. He narrowed his eyes, focusing on her face. “You know something!” He grabbed her skinny arm in a tight, vice-like grip, and she whimpered.

“You’re hurting me.” Her voice was soft as a whisper, but Jack refused to let go. For the first time in his life, he wanted to hit a woman. Vivid memories of his deceased mother suddenly filled his mind. *Jack, no matter how angry you are, you are never to hit a woman.* He closed his eyes, balling his hand into a fist, resisting the urge to pummel Cecile’s distraught, waif-like face. With her sunken cheeks and hollow eyes, she looked like a prisoner of war, but, Jack had his own war to fight, a war to get his bride back safely.

Looking directly into Cecile’s eyes, Jack told her the truth, in a cold, steel-like voice. “Lord, forgive me, but right now, I want to knock the daylights out of you. If anything happens to my wife and I realize you knew something about her, I’m going to tell the authorities that you withheld information and her blood will be on your hands. I don’t know what you’re up to, and I don’t know what kind of game you’re playing, but, right now, your actions are nothing but horsesh—”

“Jack,” Paul interrupted and Jack didn’t even realize that Paul and Pastor Michael had joined him at the top of the stairs. “Calm down. Let go of her arm and if she’s not so scared, then she might speak.”

Jack blinked a few times, stopped to stare at Cecile’s arm. He released her, noting the bruise now marring her pale skin. A shiver ran up his spine and he stepped back. This woman was so pale and thin, she didn’t even look human. Taking a few deep breaths, he tried to calm down.

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Cecile gasped, staring at her bruised arm. When Jack looked at her with his intense blue-green eyes, she realized he’d stop at nothing to get his wife back. Cecile blinked, gathering her wits, wondering what it would be like to have a man to love her in the same fashion. Jack’s deep, mesmerizing voice broke into her thoughts. “Look, I’m sorry I hurt your arm, but, I’ve got to find my wife. Do you know if she was here today?”

Swallowing, Cecile finally nodded, rubbing her sore arm. Everybody was silent, looking at her. Mrs. Roker, Jack, a tall, good-looking white man whom Cecile did not recognize, and the pastor at Jack’s church. She recognized the pastor because she’d seen him when he came to pick up Jack once when Jack was still using crutches. She’d found out who he was by listening in on Jack’s and Rose’s private conversation.

She continued to take deep breaths, trying to calm herself down. She’d had an active day. Lymen had showed up and they’d spent the entire day together. He’d taken her to a medical doctor who’d said she was very malnourished and it was hard for her to retain body heat because of her malnourished state – that’s why she was always so cold. He’d even prescribed a high-calorie diet so that Cecile could regain her strength.

She’d thought that Lymen was smitten with her. She’d seen the way he’d gazed at her mouth, as if he wanted to kiss her. When she’d made a pass at him he’d resisted her advances, stating she was not unstable, and he couldn’t act on his emotions. Cecile had no idea what he meant. Did he mean she was mentally unstable, physically unstable or both?

After the doctor visit, Lymen had taken Cecile to his office, proudly showing her where he worked. He’d been amazed at her talent for gathering information and he’d offered her a job as his secretary. He’d confided that his secretary had resigned – she’d gotten married and moved away.

Cecile had agreed to take on the job, after all, she had no other income and the funds she’d received from Mark Baker would not last forever. She figured once she was more stable, at least stable as far as Lymen was concerned, she could start another love affair, a love affair with Lymen! He might even marry her, and that would be so grand! But, would he be angry at her for telling what had transpired between them at the coffee shop yesterday? Would he renege on his offer if she revealed that Cal had hired Lymen to find Rose? Wasn’t that secret information that she was not at liberty to reveal to anybody?

“Well?” Jack’s voice broke into her thoughts. Without a doubt, she realized Jack Dawson was lovesick, crazy lovesick for his wife and he’d stop at nothing to glean information from Cecile. If Rose was killed then would Cecile be partially responsible for withholding information?

Cecile swallowed a few times, gathering her thoughts, realizing she had to do the right thing. “I will tell you all that I know. Let’s go down to the sitting room.”

**Chapter 24**

 Jack, Paul and Pastor Michael followed Cecile to the sitting room, Mrs. Roker following close behind. She touched Jack on the shoulder, returning Cal’s note which he’d shown her earlier. “Jack, let me know if I can do anything to help. I apologize for yelling at you earlier.”

 He nodded, touching Mrs. Roker’s shoulder, accepting the note, before she exited she room.

Cecile watched Jack like a hawk. Hoping he wouldn’t snap and attack her again. She stared at the bruise on her arm. The bruise had gotten darker over the last few minutes. Her head felt dizzy, and she realized she needed to eat something. She didn’t want to faint while talking to her guests.

 When Lymen had fetched her that day, she’d confided to him that her binging on the bread and butter had caused her to vomit. Lymen’s eyes had widened like saucers and he’d encouraged her to tell the doctor about what had happened. The doctor had advised her to eat small meals, not to gorge, no matter how hungry she was, since her stomach was too small and too weak to process that much food at once. After the doctor visit, Lymen had shown her his office, offering her the secretarial job. Then, afterward, he had kindly taken her to his place and fixed her a meal.

In her entire life, Cecile had never had a man to cook for her before! He’d fixed her a small plate of tasty noodles in a creamy sauce. He’d then tenderly fed her the food, his eyes full of desire whenever Cecile licked the stray sauce from her lips. Cecile had tried to kiss him but, he’d nudged her away, stating she was not well. Cecile had noticed Lymen staring at her throughout the day, his dark eyes full of sadness when he looked at her bone-thin body. His eyes had also been full of longing.

A wave of dizziness swept through her head, interrupting her deep thoughts. “I’ll be right back.”

Jack rushed to her, clamping her arm. “No, you’re not leaving.”

She looked into his blue-green eyes. His eyes sparkled with anger, as pain shot up her arm. “Jack, let me go. You’re hurting my arm.”

“I don’t trust you. If you leave this room right now, you might try and escape from this house.” His firm, beautiful lips hardened with anger, and he refused to release her arm.

“Jack, I have to get something to eat or I’ll faint.”

She sighed with relief when he released her arm. “I’m not letting you out of my sight,” he declared.

He followed her into the kitchen, and Cecile noted he smelled of sweat, muscles, and hard work. He smelled manly, and she could imagine why Rose found Jack so fetching. He stared at her while she opened the refrigerator and removed a hunk of cheese. Her hands shook while she attempted to cut into the wedge. Jack didn’t offer to help. “Hurry! We need to find my wife and you’re wasting time slicing cheese!”

The handsome white man came into the kitchen. “Jack, calm down.” Cecile still wondered about the identity of this white man.

“I have to eat, Jack. If I faint I’ll be of no use to you.” Her hands continued to shake while attempting to slice the cheese.

Jack rushed over to her, grabbed the knife from her shaky hands. Cecile gasped, stepping back. Jack howled, plunging the knife into the cheese, chopping off a huge slice. He then dropped the knife onto the table, and then forced the sliced cheese into her shaky hands. “Where is my wife? Tell me!”

“Oh!” Fear gripped her, while she witnessed Jack acting like a raging lunatic. She took a bite of cheese and exited the kitchen, Jack and the white man following close behind. She entered the sitting room, nibbling the cheese, waiting a couple of minutes before her dizziness evaporated. She finally spoke, setting her cheese on the end-table beside her chair. “I was gone for most of the day but, Rose was here. I saw her. I’d come back here for a few hours to rest before I left again.” In a rushed voice, she told of the conversation that Rose had with Geri. “She was highly upset about you not allowing her to take cooking lessons today and she was worried about arriving home in time to cook your dinner.”

Taking a deep breath, she took another bite of cheese while the three men continued to listen to her. After she’d chewed and swallowed, she revealed what had happened the previous day, Jack and Rose’s wedding day. In a rushed voice, she told them everything. She told about answering the door and meeting Lymen Smith. She told about her coffeehouse date with Lymen, and how she’d revealed her knack for listening to people’s conversations and how she’d discovered things about Jack, Rose, and The Heart Of The Ocean. She told how Lymen had paid her for the information and that Cal Hockley had hired Lymen to find Rose.

She even mentioned that after their coffee house date, Lymen was going to find Cal to tell him the location of the wedding, and take him over there. She also revealed that Cal had told Lymen that he wanted to hire somebody to break into Jack and Rose’s apartment to steal The Heart Of The Ocean. “Lymen’s a good man. He didn’t realize that Cal was going get those men he’d hired to kidnap Rose! Lymen thought that Cal only wanted his necklace back! Lymen thought he was doing the right thing since he really thought the necklace belonged to Cal. He figured Rose was a thief.”

Paul spoke. “Are you sure it was the men that Cal hired to steal the necklace who kidnapped Rose? Maybe Cal abducted her himself.”

Cecile shrugged. “I don’t know. I suppose Cal could’ve done it himself, but, Lymen said that rich people hate to do their own dirty work and usually hire others to do it for them. I figure the hired men abducted Rose and then delivered her to Cal.”

Jack jumped up from his chair, his hands balled into tight fists. He began pacing, thinking. The corded muscles in his arms tightened while he stomped around the room. “I can’t believe that Cal Hockley was at my wedding!” He stopped pacing, and he glared at Cecile, his eyes rankling with anger. “I’m determined to find my wife and you’re going to help me. Do you know where Lymen Smith lives?”

Cecile wanted to lie, but, sensed it would be a bad idea. She sensed that Jack would know if she were lying and he’d beat her black and blue until she told the truth. In a rushed voice, she told of Lymen taking her to his office that day and then taking her to his home for dinner. She also revealed that she was now employed as Lymen’s secretary.

Jack stomped over to Cecile, grabbing her arm in a forceful grip. “Come on, we’re going over to Lymen Smith’s house.”

Pain shot up her skeletal arm as Jack squeezed her bruise. Tears rushed to her eyes and she whimpered. “Jack, you’re hurting me.”

The attractive white man came over to Jack, placing his hand on Jack’s shoulder. “Jack, calm down, let her go. She’s helping us.”

Jack looked down to where he clamped Cecile’s arm. He dropped her arm. “I’m sorry. But we have to leave and talk to Lymen. He might know where Cal may have taken Rose.” When Cecile remained silent, Jack continued to speak. “He could kill Rose. He’s already tried to kills us once. He’s a lunatic and he needs to be stopped.”

“Let me go and change before we leave,” said Cecile, turning toward the sitting room door.

“NO. There’s not enough time and we have to get going!” Jack grabbed Cecile’s arm in a gentle grip. She grabbed her cheese wedge before Jack pulled her toward the door, the white man and Pastor Michael close behind. While traipsing down the hallway, Cecile wondered what people would think when they saw her in public in a nightgown, toting a wedge of cheese in her hand.

They exited the house, slamming the door behind them. Cecile tried to get into the wagon, but she felt so weak and dizzy. She needed to eat more cheese. She gasped when Jack lifted her, slamming her down onto the wagon seat. Her bones seem to rattle from the pain and she whimpered, tears streaming from her eyes. Since she was so thin and weak, she felt pain so vividly. Cecile was sure her bottom was now bruised.

Pastor Michael spoke, his deep voice gentle. “Which way?”

In a shaky voice, she told Michael where to go.

The white man spoke. “My name’s Paul, by the way. I’m sorry about Jack. He’s upset about his wife so he’s not thinking clearly.”

Cecile nodded, as the wagon jostled along. She continued to give directions as she listened to Paul talk to Jack, trying to calm him down. She eyed Paul, noting his muscled arms and large hands. He had such a deep, dark tan that she figured he worked out in the sun all day. She wondered if he were a farmer.

She nibbled her cheese, following the doctor’s orders about eating small meals throughout the day. A half hour later, they arrived at Lymen’s brownstone home. Her backside still hurt, and she struggled to get out of the wagon, still holding her cheese. Jack lifted her out, grabbed her arm and they rushed up the steps of Lymen’s home. Jack banged on the door. “Open up, Lymen Smith!”

Lymen finally opened the door, his eyes widening. “What on earth?” He then spotted Cecile. “Why are you out here wearing your nightgown? What’s happened?” Gently he stroked Cecile’s tear-stained cheek. Cecile leaned her face into Lymen’s gentle hand, her face warming from his touch. His eyes full of tenderness, he took her hand and noticed the bruise on her arm. He gasped. “Who did this to you?”

Jack howled. “Stop it!” Not explaining about the bruise, he looked directly at Lymen. “You know who I am, don’t you?”

Lymen nodded, releasing Cecile’s hand, giving Jack his full attention. He apparently recognized Jack since he’d spotted him the previous day through his high-powered binoculars at the wedding. Jack rushed to explain that Cal had arranged to have Rose kidnapped and that Lymen was partially responsible. Lymen gasped. “I didn’t realize that he was going to do that!”

“I tried to tell them that, Lymen,” Cecile chimed in.

“Where would Cal take Rose? Who did he hire to break into our home to steal the necklace?” Jack obviously needed answers to his questions and only Lymen had any leads to the answers right now.

Lymen responded. “Since I’m a private investigator, I can sometimes….refer people to others who can do certain…services for different things.” He paused. “The people who break into homes and such, are not easy to find. I’m not sure how long it’ll take before we can find the people who kidnapped Rose on Cal’s behalf.”

Jack’s cheeks clenched in anger, and Cecile again found herself stunned that a man would be so smitten with a woman. She glanced at Lymen. Would Lymen grow to love her as much as Jack loved Rose?

Lymen spoke. “I highly doubt that the people who probably kidnapped Rose yesterday would even know where she was right now. They probably delivered her to Cal and then he probably took her away.”

Cecile nodded, offering a response. “I told them that, too, Lymen.”

Jack howled, clearly upset. “You’re going to help me find Rose. Since you’re a private investigator, I’m sure you can help us find out all about Cal, maybe even help us figure where he took Rose.” He then gave Cal’s note to Lymen. “He said not to involve the authorities.”

Lymen gasped. “I know a few people we can call who work in the police department. They’re discreet. They can help us, too.” Lymen sighed, continuing to speak. “I already have a lot of information about Cal Hockley, but, the information is at my office. Whenever a new client hires me, I always investigate that person so that I know who I’m dealing with.”

“Well, then, let’s go to your office,” said Jack.

“Let me go change,” said Lymen.

“NO! My wife could be dead right now. Cal’s already tried to kill us on the Titanic! We don’t have time to waste! We need to go to your office right now and figure out where Cal may have taken Rose!”

Cecile sighed with relief when Lymen closed his door, rushing to the wagon. She sensed it was going to be a long night and she hoped that Lymen would not be mad at her for telling Jack about his investigation to find Rose.

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Jack closed his eyes, praying the entire time that it took for Pastor Michael to drive to Lymen’s office. When they arrived, he opened his eyes, gazing at Cecile on the seat beside him. Her painfully thin body, sunken tear-stained cheeks, and the bruise marring her pale, sick-looking skin, drew a measure of sympathy from him. He touched her shoulder, sickened by the way the bone stuck from beneath her skin. He sensed calmness overcoming him since he’d prayed. “I’m sorry for hurting, you, Cecile. I just don’t know what Cal’s going to do to Rose. That lunatic is capable of anything.”

Cecile gave him a brief, short nod, indicating she’d heard his words. They got out of the wagon and Jack noticed that Lymen tenderly helped Cecile from the wagon, caressing her injured arm. They walked up the steps and into the building. Lymen unlocked his door and they traipsed into the room. Lymen flicked the light on and began opening drawers, removing papers. Paul and Pastor Michael stood nearby and Jack felt sad and drained. *Lord, please don’t let anything bad happen to Rose.*

Lymen spoke. “Cecile, there’s a small stove in the adjoining room. Please make us some coffee because it will be a long night.”

Jack watched Cecile leave the room to do Lymen’s bidding. Lymen began dispensing papers to Paul, Pastor Michael and Jack. “You’ll need to look through these documents to give us clues as to where Cal may have taken Rose. He has several properties and I’m assuming he hasn’t gone too far. Jack you can read the papers about Cal’s background. Maybe there’s something mentioned in there that may give us a clue.”

Jack studied the stack of papers that Lymen had given to him. After a few minutes, he gasped, upset. “Oh, no.”

Pastor Michael spoke. “What’s wrong, Jack?”

“This background document about Cal…it’s very troubling.”

Lymen sighed. “Yes, Cal is a very troubled man. Just goes to show that money can’t make everybody happy.”

Paul stopped reading his documents, giving Jack his full attention. “What’s so troubling about his background, Jack?”

Jack sighed, groaning, realizing they really needed the Lord’s help to find Rose. “It says here that Cal was committed to a mental institution for a year when he was a child.”

“What?” Paul dropped his papers, rushing over to Jack, looking over Jack’s shoulder at the document.

Jack continued to speak. “It says here that he continuously beat on younger children and he’d even set the dormitory on fire at his boarding school.”

“Dear God in heaven, help us,” pleaded Pastor Michael, closing his eyes.

Lymen spoke. “If you continue reading, you’ll see that since Cal’s father, Nathan Hockley, was so rich, he was able to keep the whole situation quiet. He bribed the parents of the affected kids so that they wouldn’t speak about the incident and he paid for a whole new dormitory to be built. Cal supposedly was cured after he’d been in the institution for a year, but, from what you’ve told me, Jack, I think the man still suffers from mental problems.”

Jack sighed, standing up, going to the window. He looked down upon the streets of New York. If Cal had mental problems, he didn’t even want to imagine what he’d do Rose. *Lord, please don’t let anything bad happen to Rose.*

**Chapter 25**

Jack continued to silently pray all night as they pored over maps, looking at Cal’s vast property holdings and reading papers about his background, thinking, speculating. Lymen kept good on his word and called a friend of his who was a discreet policeman. The policeman gave them some insight about their search for Cal. “This secluded property over in downstate New York could be where he’s taken her. It’s only two hours away and from what we can gather it’s a hunting lodge.”

Jack frowned. “A hunting lodge?”

Lymen told them about the lodge. “Yes, Cal’s father, Nathan, and Cal would hunt for sport in that area. The lodge is secluded and I’d bet that Cal is there.”

The officer spoke. “I’ve already alerted the police force to keep a look out for Cal and Rose in our area.”

Jack’s mouth dropped open. “But, you read his note! He said no authorities.”

The policeman patted Jack’s arm. “Jack, you’ll need to trust us on this. It’s best if we’re involved because you don’t know what Cal is going to do. We’re used to handling this sort thing. If Cal gets crazy, then, you’ll want us around to help. What if Cal’s still in the area? You’ll want somebody to alert us if they see Cal or Rose.”

Sighing, Jack silently agreed, but, he didn’t like it. “Well, let’s get going.”

The policeman spoke. “Our police department has two cars we can use. We’ll take a couple of squad cars so that we can get there much quicker. The vehicles are outside.”

“Lymen, can I go with you?” Cecile’s voice sounded in the room while she approached Lymen. Lymen cradled Cecile’s hand and kissed her palm, and her pale skin flushed with embarrassment. She then shivered, as if she’d caught a chill. Jack had forgotten all about her. What a strange woman! She still held the huge wedge of cheese he’d sliced earlier and she’d apparently been nibbling on it all night. She’d been flitting in and out of the office over the last few hours like a silent ghost, her nightgown billowing out behind her when she’d walked. At one point, Jack had caught her openly staring at him, and he’d wondered what was going through her mind. Was Cecile just as crazy as Cal Hockley?

Lymen clutched Cecile’s bony fingers, shaking his head, his dark eyes full of affection. “No, I want you to stay here. We have to hurry so I don’t have time to drop you off at Mrs. Roker’s.”

Jack, the policeman, Pastor Michael, and Paul, stood at the door, waiting for Lymen. “Hurry up!” said Jack. He knew they needed to get going and they didn’t have time for romantic good-byes.

Lymen pulled Cecile into his arms and kissed her on the mouth. Jack looked away, before rushing down the stairs, everybody else following close behind. They broke up into two groups. Jack, Pastor Michael and Paul got into one police car along with the police officer who’d been helping them all night. Another officer was driving the other car and Lymen got into that vehicle.

The police officer spoke while he started the engine. “Like Lymen said, it’s going take us at least two hours to get there.”

“Two hours! Can’t you drive fast and get there quicker?” Jack didn’t know how he could ride in this squad car for two whole hours!

“Son, we’ll be going as fast as this car can carry us.”

Soon, they were on the road and Jack bowed his head and prayed, refusing to open his eyes. He took deep breaths, hoping and praying nothing bad would happen to Rose. *Lord, I’ll die if something happens to my wife.* Jack didn’t know how he’d go on living if he lost his wife after only being married to her for one day.

 Two hours later, the officer’s voice broke into Jack’s prayer. “Bingo.” Jack opened his eyes, spotting a fancy Model T in front of the secluded hunting lodge. “That’s Hockley’s vehicle.”

 “So, he has Rose trapped in there?” Jack got out of the car, and ran toward the house. The officer yelled to him to stop, but, Jack couldn’t stop. Rose could be trapped in there and he had to do what he could to find her. The early dawn sun was now shining from the sky, lighting his path toward the house. He saw there were a few windows in the cabin. He figured he had to look in each window to see if he spotted Rose inside.

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I swallowed, desperately needing a glass of water. Weak sunlight spilled into the white room, illuminating my pale body. My head raged with hot, vivid pain and I felt dried blood on my forehead.

*One day.* Dear Lord, it had been one day and Cal was still holding me hostage in an unknown house. *Lord, help me, please help me.* By the grace of God, although Cal had knocked me out, I was grateful that he had not violated my body. But, each hour, he threatened to cut the baby out of my stomach, a crazed look in his dark eyes. Then, later, the dazed expression in his eyes would disappear, and he would begin talking to me as if we were still engaged!

I almost felt as if Cal were several different people, and I had to decide which person he was before I altered my actions accordingly. I had no idea what was up with Cal, but, the entire time I’d known him, he’d never acted this!

“Water,” I mumbled.

Cal strolled into the room, and he looked insane! His dark hair appeared wild and mussed and his clothes were wrinkled. He glanced at me, a wild and crazy look in his eyes. “Why aren’t you dressed?” His eyes swiped the room, as if he were searching for something.

I blinked, realizing Cal was talking crazy again. *What was wrong with him?* “You ripped my dress, remember?” I didn’t bother mentioning that my hands and feet were shackled.

“You know you can’t wear that awful-looking dress when we go see my mother for lunch.”

*What was he talking about? Would he take me away from this place, offering a means to escape?* For the first time in hours, a thread of excitement shot through me. I decided to play along and act as if we were going out to lunch with Cal’s mother. “I need to get ready for lunch. I look awful.”

Cal strolled over to me, leering at her body like a half-starved animal. “Why are your hands and feet cuffed? Are you trying to arouse me?” His tone turned playful, and he leaned over me, stroking my pale skin with his long fingers. I tried not to flinch as he stroked my torso and my legs. “Your stomach is getting pudgy. You need to stop eating so many cookies.”

I winced, tolerating his touch. Cal’s eyes were closed, his back facing the window. I saw a thread of movement, and I gasped! Jack! Jack looked right at me, his face a rage of anger! He placed his finger to his lips, gesturing for me to remain silent. Cal continued to fondle my half-naked body. He then leaned toward my face, his mouth crashing into mine. I tried not to retch as he invaded my mouth with his tongue. He broke away from me, looking around the room, a wild expression in his eyes. “Where is the key to the cuffs?”

I’d seen him place the key into his pocket. He’d only unlocked me when I needed to go to the privy. “It’s in your pocket, remember?”

He removed the key and un-cuffed me. I wiggled my fingers and toes, excitement and hope crashing into my body. I was hoping I’d finally be rescued! I glanced at the window again and I no longer saw Jack. Was I going crazy? Had I missed Jack so much that I’d imagined seeing him at the window?

I stood on my shaky legs, looking for my ripped dress. Cal stalked toward me, slamming his hand into my cheek! I whimpered, dropping onto the floor. “You little whore! Sleeping with Jack Dawson was the worst mistake you’ve ever made!” He then grabbed my hair, pulling it until I yelped. “Don’t bother screaming. Nobody will come to rescue you here. You’re out in the middle of nowhere.” He then pulled a gun from his pocket, placing it to my temple. “I ought to blow your brains out right now. Nobody messes with Cal Hockley. I ALWAYS WIN!”

“Cal, don’t do it.” Jack’s wonderful voice suddenly sounded in the room. Cal gasped, still clutching my hair. I glanced at Jack entering the room.

“Don’t come any closer or I’ll shoot her in the head!” Cal looked at Jack, his eyes wild and crazy. “I know you have a weapon. You better disarm yourself before I blow her to pieces!” My heart beating a hundred miles per minute, I watched Jack remove a gun from his belt, sliding the weapon across the floor. The gun clattered against the wall and I almost cried. How could Jack rescue me without his weapon? “You’re nothing but trash!” Spittle flew from Cal’s mouth while he looked at Jack. “You’re nothing but poor dirty trash and she’s nothing but a filthy whore! A whore who doesn’t know how to keep her legs closed!”

I watched Jack ball his hands into fists, and I knew he was angry. I had no idea how I’d be rescued. How did he find us? Did he come out here all alone? Was I even going to make it out of here alive? Keeping my eyes open, I silently prayed, I prayed harder than I’d ever prayed in my entire life. Jack finally spoke. “That’s right, Cal. I’m poor dirty trash and I messed things up for you. But, don’t take it out on Rose. It was me. It’s all my fault. You should take me hostage instead and---”

“SHUT UP!” Cal started glancing around the room, his eyes laced with craze. I was hoping he’d get confused again and think that we needed to get ready to meet his mother for lunch. I spotted a wild stray cat traipse past the window, meowing. Cal looked over at the window for a split second. An earth-shattering gunshot filled the room when Jack fired his gun. Cal screamed, buckling over, dropping his weapon on the floor. A pool of red blood rushed from his leg and then Cal whimpered before he passed out.

Jack ran over to me and some other people rushed into the room, too. I barely paid the others any attention, my eyes were only focused on Jack Dawson. “Rose!” He pulled me into his strong arms, his lips descending onto mine. He kissed me for a long time before pushing my hair away from my face. He saw the blood on my forehead. “Oh, Rose.” He sounded wounded, hurt, and I sighed, the magnitude of what had occurred over the last day crashing upon me.

“You shot Cal.” I whispered. “How did you shoot Cal? Cal made you remove your weapon.”

“I came prepared. I had a spare gun tucked into my belt in the back.”

My mind buzzed, and then I passed out in Jack’s arms.

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 I woke up, blinking, again seeing white walls. Had I been dreaming? Was I still being held hostage by Cal Hockley? I blinked again and everything slowly came into focus. I was in a hospital room. A nurse stood at the side of my bed, giving me a warm smile. “We’ve been worried about you. I’m so glad you woke up.” Still stunned, I tried to get my bearings. I then spotted Jack sitting in a chair across the room, his eyes were closed and he was fast asleep. He looked so handsome! Razor stubble covered his cheeks and chin and his light snores spilled into the room. The nurse spoke again. “Your husband was pretty worried about you. He refused to leave your side all night.”

 Upon hearing our voices, Jack’s eyes fluttered open. He spotted me and rushed over to my bed. He pulled me into his arms, hugging me gently, kissing my cheek. His lips then touched mine in a light, spine-tingling kiss. “Hey you,” he muttered, his blue-gray eyes twinkling. Dark circles were beneath his eyes and he looked tired, tired but so handsome! Right now, Jack Dawson was the only person that I wanted to see on the face of this earth.

 “Jack.” My voice sounded cracked and my throat was dry. “Can I have some water?”

 The nurse’s voice interrupted us. “Here’s a cup of water.” She helped me to sit up and I guzzled the liquid. “Don’t drink it too fast,” she warned. After I’d emptied the cup, she gave me another cup of water. “Sip this. I’ll be back later to check on you.” The white-uniformed nurse then exited the room and I was alone with Jack.

 My forehead felt funny so I touched it, realizing a bandage covered my head. Thoughts about Cal slammed into my mind like a freight train. Tears flooded my eyes and slid down my cheeks. “Baby, what’s wrong?” Jack’s voice was full of tenderness as he wiped the tears away from my cheeks. He then placed his hand over my pregnant belly, massaging my stomach. The gesture was both erotic and loving. “Are you still worried about Cal?”

 I nodded. “Where is he?”

 “He’s in a confined room here at the hospital in the psychiatric ward. Sweetheart, the police need to talk to you about Cal. He’s not acting right. They think he’s mentally unstable. They have the note that was left in our apartment. The police were able to determine that he’d hired somebody to abduct you and he also hired somebody to break into our apartment and steal the necklace.”

 I sighed, not wanting to talk to the police, but, I figured I had to. I just wanted to go home and be alone with Jack. The police and the hospital psychiatrist came into the room a short time later and Jack stayed with me the entire time I was questioned, holding my hand. In a tearful voice, I told them about Cal’s actions. I mentioned how he seemed to have multiple personalities, acting different ways and how I had to alter my actions to accommodate his mood swings. “I’d never seen him like that before, it was like he suddenly snapped.”

 The psychiatrist nodded. “Sounds like schizophrenia. I’ve requested his files from his childhood incarceration in the mental hospital,” he sighed, patting my hand. “Sometimes, an event will happen to trigger a person’s schizophrenia.”

I gasped, worried. “You mean Cal went crazy just because I refused to marry him?”

“I didn’t say that, ma’am. There may have been no event. But, schizophrenia is sometimes linked to age. In a lot of my patients, it starts around 25 years of age, or sometime shortly before that.” He continued patting my hand. “I’m so sorry you had to go through this.”

Cold, vivid fear suddenly gripped me. “Will Cal be allowed out?” What if he came back for me again? What if he tried to kill me again?

The psychiatrist shook his head. “No, he has to be put away. He’s too unstable to be around others in society.”

After the police and the psychiatrist had exited my room, Jack pulled me into a hug. “Rose, I love you so much. We’ve been through a lot. I can’t wait for us to get home and put this entire ordeal behind us.”

“I love you too, Jack.” I took a deep breath, enjoying having Jack’s strong capable arms around me. I sensed we’d have a long and happy life together.

**Epilogue**

**Six months later…**

The strong cry of the baby filled our room, waking me from my deep sleep. I stumbled from the bed, opening my eyes, going toward the bassinet in the corner of our bedroom. Jacklyn, our newborn daughter, was the best Christmas gift we could ever imagine having. She was only one week old and already our lives had taken a turn for the better. Her bright green eyes were open, flooded with tears and her rosebud mouth wailed. Goodness, our baby had some strong lungs! I lifted our daughter from the bassinet, sat in the rocking chair, opened my nightgown and placed her on my breast, allowing her to suckle. While I fed my baby, I thought about all that had happened over the last six months.

Jack and I now lived in a small cottage, no longer living in the hovel-like apartment. After Cal had been caught and incarcerated in the mental institution, his father, Nathan Hockley had visited us. Nathan had felt bad about Cal’s actions, and devastated, he’d offered us The Heart Of The Ocean, as well as a nice bit of money, as well as this cottage. He also didn’t want us to go to the press about Cal’s actions. He was offering the money so that we’d keep our mouths shut since he didn’t want the public to know about his demented son. He also didn’t want me to press charges against Cal.

Jack had been so proud that he didn’t want to accept Nathan’s generosity, but, I’d gently reminded him that we’d earned this money, this money wasn’t charity. It was money we’d earned by suffering from the wrath of Cal Hockley.

Jack finally relented, accepting the funds. We still didn’t know what to do with The Heart Of The Ocean. I couldn’t stand to wear the necklace – it was a dreadfully heavy thing and I’d only worn it that one time. There was no way I’d ever wear that necklace again, ever.

Nathan had also helped spread the word about Jack’s artistic talent to his wealthy friends. Now, Jack gave art lessons to women and children. He made a nice income from the art lessons. We had an art studio on our property where he gave lessons. He also had learned to use paints and now did portraits and landscapes with his paints. Jack Dawson had now proven to be a recognized name in artistic circles. His paintings were fetching a nice rate, plus, he continued signing his art with his initials, date, and a small cross – the cross was to signify his faith in God.

As Jacklyn continued to suckle, I continued thinking about all that had happened to us. Cal had been incarcerated in the mental institution and one day his father had made arrangements for Cal to have a supervised visit to Nathan’s home. Upon arriving at his parents’ house Cal had gone ballistic, finding one of his father’s pistols and shooting himself in the head, ending his life. The newspaper article we’d read didn’t give many details as to what had caused Cal to snap, ending his own life. I was sure Nathan didn’t want the public to know how Cal had died, but, the story finally did get out into the public. It was also revealed that Nathan had a brother who’d committed suicide when he was only eighteen. All I could do was shudder and say a silent prayer for the Hockley family whenever I thought about Cal’s fate – mental problems obviously ran in their family.

I shivered, cradling my baby. When Jacklyn was done suckling on one side, I switched her to my other breast. I groaned, my breast was heavy with milk and I was anxious for my baby to empty my chest. She greedily suckled while I continued to think. About a week after Cal had abducted me, Jack and I had visited Cecile and Lymen at Lymen’s office. Jack had felt extremely bad about manhandling Cecile on the day that I was abducted, so he’d apologized and we also thanked both Cecile and Lymen for helping Jack to track down Cal. Cecile still seemed rather troubled and extremely thin. She’d complained about being cold even though it was the beginning of summer!

Curious, Jack and I had spoken to Lymen about Cecile in private and Lymen had admitted to us that he loved Cecile but he felt sorry for her. We were shocked to find out about her being a rich man’s mistress who’d forced her to starve herself. Lymen also confided that he’d taken Cecile to a medical doctor and he explained that he didn’t think she was mentally or physically able to handle a romantic relationship at that time. Lymen told us that he took Cecile to the doctor regularly to monitor her progress so that she could get well. Lymen also admitted taking Cecile to see a psychiatrist – he wanted to be sure she was mentally stable before he acted on his emotions. Although it was hard for us to do, we told Lymen that we’d pray for both him and Cecile. Cecile was certainly troubled and she needed lots of divine help.

After Cal’s death, I finally reached out to my mother again. I wanted her to see Jacklyn. Jack supported me with my decision, but, warned me that my mother might reject me again. “Rose, I love you and I’ll support you with your decision to contact your mom, but, be careful. Don’t get too emotionally distraught if she rejects you again.” I knew he was referring to the time when I’d spent the entire night in an alley when my mom disowned me. I didn’t have the nerve to visit her at the seamstress shop, so, I wrote her a letter, telling her about Jacklyn’s birth and I invited her to our cottage on Christmas day.

I knew if my mom came on Christmas, she’d be shocked. I also invited Paul and Thelma – both of them have been married for about a month. I’d also invited Pastor Michael and Geri over for Christmas. I’m sure my mom would have a heart attack – sitting down and breaking bread with Blacks, but, if she happened to change her mind and want to be in my life again, then, she’d have to accept me for the way that I was.

So far, my mother had not responded to my letter. I was hoping and praying she’d show up on Christmas day, ready to accept me back as her daughter. Since Cal had committed suicide, I was hoping that my mother could see the error of her ways, hopefully accepting the fact that if I had married Cal, my life would’ve been unbearable.

Jacklyn cooed, obviously happy now that her tummy was full.

Jack woke up and stumbled out of bed. It was still the middle of the night. Since Jacklyn had been born, we had not had a full night’s rest. A full moon shined in the dark sky, illuminating our room with pale, white light. Jack strolled over to me, getting on his knees beside the rocking chair. Taking his finger, he touched Jacklyn’s cheek. “She’s so beautiful,” he said in a soft voice. “She looks just like you.”

I smiled, gazing at our daughter. She did look exactly like me. With her red hair and green eyes, she looked like a miniature replica of me! Jack leaned toward me, and we shared an earth-shattering, erotic kiss.

“I love you, Rose Dawson.”

I smiled. “I love you too, Jack.”

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