

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	ix
Prologue – Brown Envelopes	xv
Chapter One – Faith	
New York City, May 1, 1915 (Four Years Later)	1
Chapter Two – The Crossing	
New York City, June 1911 (Four Years Earlier)	15
Chapter Three – Rocket Science	
Washington D.C., June 1911.....	37
Kaluga, Russia, June 1911	41
Chapter Four – Poseidon’s Thrust	
The Atlantic Ocean, June 1911	49
Chapter Five – An English Education	
Liverpool, July 1911	65
Chapter Six – Boodles and Breakers	
London, August 1911	75
Newport, September 1911.....	79
Chapter Seven – Rising Tide	
Providence, October 1911	97
Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 1911.....	100
Woodstock, England, February 1912	102
Potsdam, Germany, February 1912.....	104
Lincroft, New Jersey, April 1912	110
Chapter Eight – American Brothers	
Kiel, Germany, May 1912	113

Chapter Nine – Prophet and Disciple

Kaluga, Russia, May 1912..... 119

Chapter Ten – German Brothers

Gmunden, Austria, May 1912.....129

Potsdam, June 1912.....136

Chapter Eleven – Encounters

Cowes, Isle of Wight, August 1912139

Newport, August 1912142

Chapter Twelve – The Launch

New Haven, Connecticut, September 1912.....153

Vienna, October 1912157

Berlin, May 1913.....162

Chapter Thirteen – A Picture Worth a Thousand Words

New Haven, Connecticut, June 1913..... 171

Chapter Fourteen – Gathering Storm

Staten Island, New York, March 1914.....195

Cowes, Isle of Wight, July 1914.....197

Liverpool, August 1914.....203

Adirondacks, Upstate New York, September 1914.....204

Chapter Fifteen – Where There’s Smoke

New Haven, Connecticut, September 1914..... 211

Berlin, September 1914217

Deer Iland, Upstate New York, September 1914 218

The North Sea, September 1914..... 222

Chapter Sixteen – The Network

New Haven, Connecticut, October 1914 227

Chapter Seventeen – The War

Letter from Ypres, Belgium, November 1914 235

The North Sea, Christmas Eve, 1914..... 239

Ypres, Belgium, Christmas Day, 1914 243

Fuhlsbüttel, Germany, January 19, 1915 245

TABLE OF CONTENTS

New York City, January 1915	248
The North Sea, March 1915	251
Chapter Eighteen – Reverse Cross	
Liverpool, April 1915	253
New York City, April 1915	258
Chapter Nineteen – The Quest	
New Haven, Connecticut, April 1915	261
Chapter Twenty – Innocence Gone	
Ypres, April 22, 1915.....	275
Chapter Twenty-One – Farewell	
New York City, April 1915	283
New Haven, Connecticut, April 1915	287
New York City, April 30, 1915	289
Chapter Twenty-Two – Folly	
The Atlantic Ocean, May 3, 1915.....	293
Chapter Twenty-Three – Cat and Mouse	
Berlin, May 4, 1915	311
London, May 5, 1915	313
The Celtic Sea, May 6, 1915	315
The Atlantic Ocean, May 6, 1915.....	318
Liverpool, May 7, 1915.....	322
Chapter Twenty-Four – Fate	
The Celtic Sea, May 7, 1915	327
London, May 7, 1915.....	328
Epilogue	347
Author’s Limited Edition Bonus Content	353

Prologue – Brown Envelopes

New York City, June 1911

Neily saw the large brown envelope on his desk as he entered his office at the Interborough Rapid Transit Company. He wondered what the mail clerk who delivered it must have thought. Why was Cornelius Vanderbilt, a name synonymous with American railroading, not at the family's New York Central?

Damn them!

Neily tore open the envelope and extracted the *Scientific Review* magazine. Despite holding thirty patents, he was hungry for more and subscribed to many scientific journals. His best invention, a corrugated fire-box that improved locomotive power, sold strongly in Europe years before it was adopted by his own family's New York Central Railroad.

Damn them all! Maybe I won't even show them my new cylindrical tank car.

Neily furrowed his thick, black eyebrows as he scrutinised the cover. A white rocket sped across a blue background covered with white geometric lines, numerals and notes. At the bottom it read:

The Exploration of Cosmic Space by Means of Reactive Devices.

Neily devoured the article by Russian scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, tucking and untucking his long, thin fingers from under his thighs. He leaned back in his chair, muttering in astonishment.

If Tsiolkovsky is right, I can revolutionise transportation. I'll show them. I will make my own fortune just like the Commodore did. I will live up to the name Cornelius Vanderbilt.

Munich, June 1911

Ernst saw the American postage stamps and knew what the envelope must contain. The *Scientific Review* was the only American magazine to which he subscribed. He was pleased to see they had followed his instructions and it was addressed simply to Ernst Guelph, 1st Royal Bavarian Heavy

Cavalry, Prince Charles of Bavaria Regiment. There was no mention of his own princely title.

Ernst pulled out the magazine and looked at the image of a rocket racing across a blue background. He grimaced when he saw the author's name: Tsiolkovsky, a Russian. Ernst preferred the more rigorous German approach to science. As he read Tsiolkovsky's words, however, Ernst leaned forward in his chair and the tapping of his fingers grew faster.

My God! If this is correct, the military potential is astonishing.

Then Ernst saw the footnote. 1903! The original article was published in Russia in 1903, eight years ago. Ernst was stunned. It confirmed the backwardness of the Russians that they could sit on this for eight years.

I must find this Tsiolkovsky. If he is right, I can use this to redress my family's humiliation.

Washington D.C., June 1911

Robert had brought with him a satchel of mail he intended to read during the journey to visit his parents in Washington, D.C. When the train pulled into the massive new terminal it lay untouched. Robert had gotten caught up reviewing the latest proposals for Yale's Science Hill. He had remained at Yale after graduating the previous year to help a professor with his experiments. Instead, he spent much of his time working on plans for new laboratories on Science Hill.

Robert blinked in the dazzling reflection of the white Bethel granite as he exited the station. He smiled thinking of the irony of the first building ever constructed of the stone. The owner of the Vermont quarry had refused to sell his stone for anything other than funerary monuments after his son died on a railroad crossing. Once the quarry owner followed his son into the afterlife, his white granite was promptly used to build the largest train terminal in the world.

Robert climbed into a horse-drawn taxi and told the driver, "The White House, please."

"The White House?" the driver asked, scowling.

"Yes, the White House," Robert said, vacillating between amusement and annoyance. He added, "They are expecting me."

"If you say so," the driver said as he slapped the reins on the horse's back. As the taxi joined the traffic, Robert pulled the unopened mail from his satchel. Choosing the largest item first, he extracted a magazine with a white rocket on a blue background. He read the feature article with interest as the taxi made its way through the streets of Washington.

Heavens! Wait until Dad learns about this.

When they approached the White House, Robert directed the driver to the side entrance, paid the fare and went inside. The driver asked one of staff collecting Robert's luggage, "Hey, who was that fellow?"

"Robert Taft. The President's son."

Kaluga, Russia, June 1911

When Yvicha collected the envelope and saw the American postage stamps she knew how happy the contents would make the old man. She made a quick change to her shopping plans and selected a plump chicken from the butcher.

Tonight we will celebrate! After all these years the old man will finally get his ideas into the open. Where other scientists can debate them. Ilya will be so pleased after his hard work translating the master's writings for the American magazine.

She clutched the magazine as she walked home, as if to protect it. The master's theories had been published eight years earlier in a Russian magazine. It had contained an article critical of the Tsar so the Okhrana had confiscated all of the copies.

Now at last, fifteen years after the old man first submitted his theories for publication, they would reach the world.

What does this mean for the old man? For Ilya? For us? Will I be able to convince Ilya to leave Russia?

Chapter One – Faith

New York City, May 1, 1915 (Four Years Later)

Alfred alighted from his motorcar and at once sensed the familiar bulk of the *Lusitania*, the largest and most luxurious ship making the transatlantic run. Her sister ship, the *Mauretania*, was laid up in Liverpool for use by the Admiralty and the *Titanic* was gone these past three years. From under his bowler hat, he looked at the great riveted hull that dwarfed the attentive men preparing her for sailing.

She had similarly dwarfed the three thousand men who had constructed her, yard by yard. Her launch from the shipyard of John Brown & Co. into the River Clyde in Scotland had heralded a new era of steamship travel. It had been during her maiden voyage to New York in 1907 that Cunard's rival White Star announced the commissioning of the *Titanic*.

Alfred ignored the crowds, accustomed to their attention, as he made his way towards the gangway reserved for Cunard's saloon class passengers. He abandoned his luggage to the care of his valet, Denyer.

"Mister Vanderbilt!" a reporter called as bulbs flashed. "Did you see this? Did you read the warning in the paper this morning?"

Someone thrust a copy of the New York Times in front of him.

"Yes, I saw it."

The newspaper was folded to show the Cunard sailing schedule and beneath it:

-- NOTICE --

Travellers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or any of her allies, are liable to destruction on those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain do so at their own risk.

*Imperial German Embassy
Washington D.C., April 22, 1915*

“It’s a hoax, gentlemen. The Lusitania is the fastest ship in the world. There’s no submarine that can catch her.”

Alfred tipped his hat and made his way up the gangway, hoping he had sounded convincing. He had long become accustomed to the photographers’ flashes and he gave them the millionaire’s smile they expected. At thirty-seven, he was already wise to the pitfalls of showing them anything else.

From the gangway, he looked down on the figures moving about the triangular foredeck like frenzied insects with a common purpose. A group of men were guiding a webbed crane load of cargo through an open hatch. Alfred stopped and pulled a telegram from his pocket. It had been delivered to the Vanderbilt Hotel the previous evening. He read it again:

THE LUSITANIA IS DOOMED. DO NOT SAIL ON HER.

The telegram was signed simply MORTE.

Alfred looked over the buildings on Pier 54. In one of these buildings, packed in a piano case marked *Ship’s Supplies*, was the solution to the war in Europe. In a few minutes, Cunard men would bypass customs and load the piano case as if it contained only a musical instrument for passengers’ amusement.

He searched the dock for signs of his other unorthodox cargo: a horsebox containing two of his prized coach horses.

Where is Ewan with the truck? I should be able to see it.

He searched the dock for the familiar maroon and gold truck of Oakland Farm. Perhaps Oakland Boy and Sagamore Lad had already been hoisted into the cargo hold?

“Welcome aboard, Mister Vanderbilt.”

Alfred turned to see Captain Turner approaching him with an outstretched hand.

“Thank you, Captain. What do you make of this warning in the papers?”

“Nothing to it. No submarine is fast enough to catch us. No ship doing more than fourteen knots has ever been torpedoed. Even with one boiler room shut down to save coal we can achieve twenty-one knots. Besides, HMS *Juno* is to meet us off Fastnet and escort us to Liverpool.”



Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, 1907



“Come on! Come on! Come on! Go! Go! Go!” Sean said to himself – or so he thought. The look from the woman before him could only mean he had spoken aloud.

“In a hurry, are you?” she asked. Despite his large size, Sean had a straightforward, simple demeanour that made him seem almost childlike. His blond dishevelled hair hung over a round face that remained friendly despite his obvious unease. He held on to the rocking omnibus with one of his large hands while clutching an envelope in the other.

“Yes,” Sean answered the woman. “My fiancée will be deported unless I can get to the *Lusitania* with this letter.”

Inside the envelope was a health waiver for his fiancé Claire, signed by the Mayor of Boston. Claire’s brother Gwer, who worked in the Mayor’s office, had obtained it on learning that his sister had failed the health inspection required of all third class passengers. She was being held on the ship for deportation back to England. Gwer had pledged his meagre income to meet any of his sister’s medical costs and thus obtained the waiver. Sadly, it had taken precious time to obtain.

Gwer had caught a train to Portsmouth to deliver the waiver to his sister’s fiancé, Sean, who worked as a groom at Alfred Vanderbilt’s Oakland Farm. Sean had continued the urgent journey to the Hudson River piers, rushing through the splendour of the Vanderbilts’ new Grand Central Terminal and jumping onto the first omnibus heading for the piers.

Leaning dangerously far out, Sean caught a glimpse of the great liner in her berth at Pier 54. He was astonished. The ship was even more remarkable than he had expected, towering over the buildings on the pier. Her sharp prow morphed into a sensuous curve that wrapped the ship as it ran to the stern.

Sean looked at his watch. Twenty-five minutes to sailing time.

Damn!

When the omnibus slowed, he leapt to the ground and ran towards the *Lusitania*.



Ewan, another groom employed at Oakland Farm and a childhood friend of Sean's, drove a large, maroon truck up to the cargo entrance to Pier 54. Ewan was a handsome young man with angular features, black hair and a trim figure. His eyes were pale grey and gave him an arresting, wolflike look that sometimes caused people to stare.

As planned, Ewan had delayed his arrival to coincide with the frenetic period just before sailing. The truck was stencilled with gold letters *Oakland Farm* and beneath it: *Caution! Horses!*

The Customs Inspector asked Ewan, "So what have you got then?"

"Horses. For Mister Alfred Vanderbilt, Parlour Suite B 65 to 67."

"I'll be damned," the Inspector said. "I saw it on the manifest but I didn't believe it. Show me."

Ewan led the Inspector to the back of the truck where he proudly exposed the pedigreed rumps of Sagamore Lad and Oakland Boy, the finest coach horses in America.

The Inspector said to Ewan, "You left it a bit late, lad. Better hurry to Area F."

Ewan drove through the gate into the fray of wagons, trucks and dock workers.

"There!" his companion shouted, pointing across the cargo area. "Building C, the one that says *Ship Supplies*. That's where it's being kept until just before the sailing. It's good that some who love Ireland work the piers."

"And the German agents?" Ewan asked.

"Already on board. Stowed away yesterday. They will seek you out."

"How will I know them?"

"They'll find you. It's safer this way, but you have a back-up contact. A steward by the name of Neil Leach. He knows how to contact the German agents on board but he doesn't know your identity. If you need his help you must approach him and use the pass code."

"So I ask him if he is going to visit his aunt?"

"Yes. He will know to expect this and will answer, 'Yes, but I am told she has already passed on.' That is the same code the Germans will use to identify themselves when they approach you."

"Understood," Ewan replied.

The doors to Building C were open and Ewan drove directly in. He stopped the truck before a large wooden case stencilled *CUNARD LINES, Ship Supplies – Piano, Use Care*.

The two men beside the crate were surprised when four men jumped out of the truck and closed the doors of the warehouse.

“Hey, what are you...” protested one of the workers, but stopped mid-sentence when he saw that one of the intruders had drawn a pistol and was running towards him. The gun was brought down on the worker’s skull and he dropped him to the floor.

Then the assailant pointed the pistol at the other dockworker and said, “Drag your friend into the office.”

He handcuffed both men to the radiator in the small room. He kicked the unconscious man a few times, then shoved a rag into the mouth of the other one and left, slamming the door.

Ewan led Oakland Boy out of the right stall of the box, down the ramp and handed the reins to a boy.

“This is Oakland Boy. When we leave, mix in with the other horses on the pier and take him to the livery behind the Vanderbilt Hotel.”

The others had already pried open the piano crate. As expected, there was no piano inside. The men transferred the strange contents to Oakland Boy’s vacant stall and filled the empty piano crate with bricks. Someone pounded on the warehouse door.

“That’s them, come to load the piano crate. Jump in lads, we have to get to Area F to load the horsebox.”

One of the men opened the door and jumped on to the truck as Ewan drove past the puzzled dockworkers.

“Got your ticket?” the man in the cab asked Ewan.

“Right here,” Ewan slapped a canvas bag beside him. Protruding from the top was an envelope bearing the Cunard logo of a red flag.



Near the third class gangway, Sean was told firmly by a security guard, “It’s passengers only from this point and you ain’t no passenger.”

“Like I told you, I am not trying to get on the ship. I am trying to get someone off it.”

“My instructions are no one past this point without a valid ticket or a pass.”

Sean was panicking. The last of the third class passengers had already boarded.

“There must be someone I can see?” Sean pleaded.

The guard answered, “Go back to the entrance and find an officer. Gold braid.” The man pointed to his cuff. “Maybe he can help you.”

Sean searched frantically for an officer. Everyone was busy. No one had time for the problems of an Irish third class passenger. At last he found an officer willing to read the health exemption.

“Here. Take this pass. It gives you permission to go onboard, but it may be too close to sailing time.”

Sean grabbed the pass and rushed past the guard to the gangway that led to a closed door of the ship. He pounded and pounded until it opened

just enough for a ship's steward to look out and demand, "What's going on here?"

Sean held up the pass and the health waiver, saying, "I need to get my fiancée off the ship. She is being deported but it's a mistake."

"I wish I could help you..."

"You can! Just let me on board."

"I can't do that. You're too late. You Irish need to learn to play by the rules!" The door clanged shut with a sickening finality.

Sean looked around frantically. The gangway for first and second class had already been pulled back. He looked down at the cargo area. There was still some activity beside an open door. Then he saw Ewan attaching the ropes of a crane to the horsebox.

Sean ran across the gangway, down the stairs marked *Staff Only* and on to the pier. The horsebox was in mid-air now. Ewan was watching the crane hoist and swing it over the prow.

"Ewan!" Sean called out to him.

Ewan turned, surprised. "What are you doing here?"

"You have to help me. I have the reprieve for Claire."

Ewan looked up at the gangways that were being pulled back into the building and said, "I don't think you're getting her off now."

"Let me go in your place. I can take care of the horses."

Ewan looked up at the horsebox, just disappearing from view over the ship's side.

"I can't," Ewan said to his friend.

"Why not? Mr. Vanderbilt trusts me. I'll say you're sick."

"It's not that."

"What then?"

Ewan shook his head. "I just can't, that's all. I have to go. I'm sorry." Ewan walked over to collect his bag from the doorway of a cargo building.

Sean followed him and picked up a crowbar used to open cargo crates. As Ewan leaned over to pick up his bag, Sean struck him on the head with the crowbar. Ewan went down in a heap on the ground.

"No, I'm the one who's sorry." Sean pulled his friend's limp body through the doorway into the dark interior. He grabbed Ewan's bag and ran for the open cargo door of the ship, the only one still open.

"Who are you then? Ticket?" a crew member asked Sean at the door.

"Groom of Mister Vanderbilt. Looking after those two horses we just loaded." Sean pulled open the Cunard envelope and handed the man Ewan's ticket.

"Jesus! Horses on the *Lusitania*." The man shook his head as he stepped back for Sean to pass. Sean entered the *Lusitania* on the Orlop Deck designed for crew. It bore no hallmarks of the luxury for which the liner was famous. The size of the service passageways, however, attested to the massive scale of the ship. Sean located his cabin and on entering it discovered Denyer, Alfred Vanderbilt's valet.

"I thought Ewan was coming to look after the horses," said a surprised Denyer "I'm afraid he was taken ill. I will be looking after the

boys this trip.” Sean hoped he hadn’t sounded suspicious to Denyer.

“Well, no matter. I will let Mister Vanderbilt know you will find him to report on the horses once we are underway.”

After Denyer left, Sean dug through Ewan’s bag until he found the familiar maroon uniform of an Oakland Farm groom. Ewan’s shoulders were broad like Sean’s and they were similar in height. The jacket was fine but the waist of the trousers was problematic since Ewan had a small, narrow waist. Sean gave up on the top button and tried to hide it behind a belt as he felt the liner get underway.

As Sean dug his hands into the last of Ewan’s clothing he was surprised to feel something hard and cold in the bag. He pushed the clothes aside and was shocked by what he saw: a revolver. Sean locked the door to the cabin and inspected the gun.

Ewan has a revolver? What would Ewan need a gun for?

Sean returned the revolver to the bag, rolled it up tightly and stowed it away. He was desperate to begin his search for Claire but he knew that Denyer would have informed their employer to expect his report on the horses.

Ewan made his way towards the prow of the ship. Everyone in the stables was familiar with the story: that Mister Vanderbilt was taking his two favourite coaching leads with him on the *Lusitania*. He booked passage for three automobiles and only afterwards informed Cunard Lines he intended to use the space to accommodate a horsebox with space on either side to walk the horses.

Alfred was a regular and appreciated passenger. Although Parlour Suite B 65 to 67 cost less than either of the regal suites Alfred booked on occasion, it was still a small fortune even before the incidental charges. No one was really surprised that Cunard had acquiesced about the horses.

Sean found the horsebox directly under the cargo hatch with space around it marked with chalk: *Leave Clear for Vanderbilt Horses*. Sean was experienced with horse shows and immediately set up a cable with pulleys as a hitching line.

He opened the left stall and saw the familiar rump of Sagamore Lad, transported as always in the same front left position from which he pulled the coach. It never failed to amuse his boss that the pair even grazed that way when at leisure.

Sean attached a rope to Sagamore Lad and backed him out of the box, pleased that the horse seemed unconcerned by the gentle rumbling of the ship’s engines. Sagamore Lad was fitted with special rubber shoes that squeaked as Sean led him around the cargo hold. Sean attached the lead rope to the cable pulley and went to attend Oakland Boy.

He pulled open the right stall. There was no Oakland Boy.

What the devil? What has Ewan have gotten himself into? Is this why he has a revolver in his luggage?

Sagamore Lad approached with a lowered head and snorted.

“Well what do make of this Sagamore Lad?” Sean asked as he patted the horse’s nose. “Where’s your mate?”

Sean inspected the curious contents of the stall.

Whoever put this here clearly wants it hidden. If Ewan is involved it probably relates to the Irish cause. I can't see Mister Vanderbilt taking that up. Does he know about this? Is he aware Oakland Boy isn't in his stall?

Sean closed the right stall and led Sagamore Lad back into the left side of the horsebox. Sean was anxious to make his way to Mister Vanderbilt's parlour suite.

"Let's see what he knows about the curious contents of your mate's stall," he whispered to the horse.



Lusitania Saloon Class Lounge and Music Room, 1910

As Sean approached the saloon class area, he finally saw the interiors responsible for the ship's reputation for luxury. The plainer décor of the lower decks gave way to elaborate mouldings picked out in gilt. Sean was staring at one of the wood-panelled rooms when a steward inquired after the nature of his visit.

"I work for Mister Vanderbilt. I am the groom taking care of his horses. Can you please direct me to Parlour Suite B 65 to 67?"

"What's your name?"

"Ewan," Sean lied.

The steward led him to the suite, knocked and announced, "Your groom, Ewan, sir."

"Excellent," Alfred called. "Send him in."

The steward let Sean past into the large sitting room. The middle portion of the room extended into the Promenade Deck, bringing abundant light through the large rectangular ports.

"Sean!" came a woman's voice.

Sean was startled to see Wally seated in an upholstered chair in his employer's suite. Walburga, who went by Wally, was the niece of his previous employer in Liverpool, the chairman of Cunard Lines. She was

as pretty as he remembered; fresh faced with brown hair tucked under a fashionable hat, which surprised him.

Alfred looked at Sean quizzically and said, "Well hello. And what are we to call you then? Sean or Ewan?"

"Apologies, sir. I didn't have a chance to notify you before sailing. Ewan was taken ill quite suddenly. We thought it best if I came in his place to look after Sagamore Lad and Oakland Boy."

"Well, I am sorry to hear about Ewan's illness but glad the boys have a skilled groom. How are they?"

"Fine, sir. I took Sagamore Lad out first and walked him a bit. Seems happy enough, sir." Sean paused.

"And Oakland Boy?"

"Same, sir. Both walked and back in their stalls," Sean lied.

"Excellent. And I believe you know Miss Schwabe?"

"Indeed, sir. Nice to see you again, miss."

"Lovely seeing you also, Sean." Wally meant it. She had forgotten how attractive the big, friendly Irishman was. Yes, she thought, Ewan is more handsome, almost pretty, but Sean is solidly masculine; like a dependable draft horse.

Wally said, "I am travelling with my sister, her husband and their children to visit my uncle."

Wally suddenly noticed that the top button of Sean's trousers was unfastened. She became embarrassed.

Gracious, did he catch me looking? Girls simply don't do such things, although I am hardly the inexperienced girl I was four years ago. What's become of me? A moment ago I was thinking how handsome Alfred looks and now I am looking at Sean's trousers. Get a hold of yourself! Sean and Alfred both belong to other women.

"Well, I won't disturb you," Sean said. "I just wanted to let you know the horses are fine." With a polite bow, he moved towards the door of the cabin.

Sean was desperate to talk to Wally about Claire. Whenever Wally visited her uncle in Liverpool, Claire served as her maid. Sean knew that even with a waiver from the Mayor of Boston the troubles of a third class Irish passenger were of less consequence than the whims of a saloon class passenger – particularly the niece of the chairman of Cunard Lines.

Alfred said, "Thank you for the report. I will go with you to check on them myself at some point."

That should be interesting, thought Sean as he closed the door behind him. He found a first class steward who supplied him with paper and pencil. He wrote a note to Wally asking for her urgent assistance on a matter important to Claire's well being. When he handed the envelope to the steward, the man recognised the name Wally Schwabe and smiled.

"I will make sure Miss Schwabe receives it," the steward said as he escorted Sean out of the saloon class area.

Sean lay on his bed, anxious, awaiting a response from Wally to his note. His mind was racing as he tried to develop credible scenarios to explain his situation. Alfred Vanderbilt did not appear to know Oakland Boy had not been loaded. He had even suggested he come to visit the horses himself.

Sean grew impatient and decided fresh air might help his nerves. He made his way to the port side of the Shelter Deck open to third class passengers. He leaned against the railing and studied an uninterrupted stretch of white beach. Beyond it he could see more water that separated the large sand bar from the mainland.

“Fire Island,” a steward informed him. “Miles and miles of perfect beach. Surprises most people to learn New York has beautiful beaches.”

As Sean admired the view, he began to experience the unnerving sensation of being watched. He turned to find himself being observed by a man, who now approached and asked “So you’re on your way to visit your aunt?”

Sean was puzzled by the strange question as well as the man’s German accent.

Sean answered, “No.”

The man looked surprised and repeated the question slowly. This time Sean did not answer but shook his head. Then he realised the German was not alone as two other men approached them.

“You are the Vanderbilt groom, are you not?” asked the German.

“Yes,” Sean replied. The man’s tone was threatening and Sean grew nervous about being outnumbered.

“But you are not on your way to visit your aunt?”

Sean realised this must be a coded question to which Ewan would have known the answer.

“Answer the question,” he said again to Sean as one of the other men grabbed Sean’s elbow.

“Hey, what’s going on here?” the steward’s voice interrupted them as he walked up to the group. He gave a disapproving look at the man holding Sean’s arm. “Is there a problem?”

“No, no problem,” the German answered as he released Sean’s elbow. “We’ll continue our walk.” He motioned for the other two to follow him down the deck.

“What was that about?” the steward asked Sean.

“No idea,” Sean answered.

The steward studied Sean’s face for a moment, seemed satisfied and quickly walked after the other men.

Sean watched the steward question the men and noticed him signal for a passing crew member to join him. A minute later, the second crew member walked away and returned with four men, one of them in a policeman’s uniform and sporting a holster.

A number of passengers were watching the group with interest but Sean kept his distance. The steward eventually led the entire party into the ship’s interior and Sean turned back towards the flawless beaches of Fire Island.

His mind was racing with conjecture.

Germans. Could Ewan be involved with Germans? Was Vanderbilt involved? And what about Wally? Could she be involved in this also? Were they all spies? Working for Germany? None of it made any sense.



Wally and her older sister Gladys were taking in the fine view of the Atlantic from two lounge chairs on the Promenade Deck reserved for saloon passengers. Gladys held her baby on her lap while the other Crompton children played under the supervision of their nanny.

Wally was enjoying being with her nieces and nephews again after her years living abroad. She had lived with her sister and her family in Philadelphia after their parents died. Wally had left them four years ago to study in Germany. She was happy to be travelling with them now to visit Uncle Rhed in Liverpool.

The two sisters were very different and studying in Germany offered Wally a means to escape her sister's overprotective interference. Wally got her intellectual curiosity from her father, who had always encouraged her to read widely, keep an open mind and form her own opinions.

By contrast, Gladys took after their mother. She was conservative, devoutly religious and a strict but committed parent. Gladys was unflinching in her commitment to those doctrines she considered appropriate for proper living. Anything outside these boundaries was viewed with suspicion and usually rejected. Five years living in China had demonstrated to Gladys that with sufficient fortitude and resolve, a proper household could be maintained even under the most challenging conditions.

Wally was surprised to see Captain Turner approaching them.

"Miss Schwabe, Mrs. Crompton. Good afternoon. I hope you are comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you, Captain," Wally replied for them both.

"Miss Schwabe, you mentioned that you wanted to see the map room. Perhaps this is a good time?"

Wally started to correct him. She had never expressed any interest in seeing the map room. Then she realised something else was afoot.

"Oh yes, thank you," she said. "Excuse me, Gladys, you don't mind, do you?"

"No, of course not, I will be right here with the children. Paul will turn up sooner or later."

Wally walked with the Captain up the deck.

"Maps, Captain?"

"Sorry, I couldn't think of anything else but I am glad you caught on. I have something to tell you. We have just discovered three German stowaways on the ship."

"Spies?"

“We don’t know. Two don’t appear to speak any English and we have so far failed to get anything useful out of the one that does.”

“Where are they now?”

“Locked up down below. Staff Captain Anderson, the master-at-arms and a Liverpool policeman named Pierpont are questioning them with the help of the ship’s interpreter.”

“And you think it has something to do with the special cargo in the piano crate?”

“Perhaps. We are not certain, but I thought you should know. You should also be aware, miss, that your uncle and I discussed your special cargo at length.”

“Oh?”

“Yes. Whether or not to bring that cargo on board. I want you to know that I support and appreciate what you and your associates are trying to do. My son Norman is serving with the Royal Artillery in France. I want this war over too, but you must understand that my first priority is the safety of my passengers.”

Wally met the Captain’s stern expression with an even gaze, unsure what reaction he expected from her.

“I will take whatever actions necessary to protect my passengers and crew including pitching your cargo over the side. In the meantime, however, I have increased the security watch over the hold where the piano case is stored.”

“Thank you, Captain. I will share this information with Mister Vanderbilt.”

“Thank you, miss. I have also sent a message on the Marconi to your uncle to inform him of the stowaways.”

The Captain tipped his cap and departed. Wally rushed to Alfred’s cabin where she encountered Sean leaving.

“Oh miss, I am so glad to see you,” he said. “I need to speak with you.”

“Sean, yes, of course, but now isn’t a good time.”

Sean was shocked. *Could she be so callous?*

“I have to see Mister Vanderbilt right now, I’m sorry.”

“Did you receive my note?” he asked, incredulously.

“Oh, that was from you?” she replied. “I’m so sorry. Jones gave it to me just as the children arrived with Gladys and I set it down and completely forgot about it. I will read it when I get back to my cabin. Now, I really must see Mister Vanderbilt urgently.”

With that she knocked on the door and was admitted by Denyer.

The door closed behind her on a seething Sean. He thought to himself, it’s clear she has no time for other people’s problems. He had been anxiously waiting to tell Wally about Claire’s predicament. He had even considered telling her about the strange contents of Oakland Boy’s stall and seeking her advice.

I can no longer wait for Wally; I must try to rescue Claire on my own. I will keep quiet about the unusual cargo and watch everyone for clues of is responsible and who might be involved with the Germans.

Inside Alfred's suite, Wally told Alfred the Captain's news about the stowaways.

"I'm sorry, Wally," Alfred said when she finished. He rose and came behind her chair, putting his hands on her shoulders. The physical familiarity surprised Wally and excited her. His hands were warm and reassuring through her blouse.

"I fear I have brought you, your uncle and his company into danger. Let us hope we have not endangered the lives of the other passengers."

Wally touched his hand and said, "Well, Uncle Rhed knows what is at stake. Ending the war may save Cunard as well as lives at the front. He dismissed the last captain for objecting to carrying war materials on the *Lusitania*."

"Really?" Alfred said with surprise.

Wally recounted what the steward, Jones, told her on her previous crossing to New York; namely, that her uncle had informed Captain Dow he should take a leave of absence due to his nerves.

Alfred said, "Hopefully they can get the stowaways to talk. In the meantime, I am glad Captain Turner has increased security."

Wally rose to leave. She exchanged a long look with Alfred near the door. She was confident that he still found her as attractive as he did when they first met on the *Lusitania* four years earlier. Their efforts to smuggle the secret cargo to England had brought them close together. At thirty-seven, Alfred retained the youthful vigour and confidence of a man in his prime. Compared to their first meeting, he seemed to have matured and his calm, deliberate demeanour made him more attractive. She kissed him on the cheek and left his parlour suite.

Back in her room, Wally found the envelope from Sean. She was horrified when she read the note.

Poor Claire! I couldn't find her to say goodbye when we docked in New York. What could have happened to her? And what must Sean think of me? No wonder he was trying to speak to me so urgently.

She pushed the button to summon the steward Jones.

"Jones, please find Mister Vanderbilt's groom. His name is Sean. Bring him to me as quickly as you can."

When she admitted Sean to her cabin he made it seem smaller at once.

"Sean, I am so sorry. I had no idea Claire was in trouble."

Sean smiled his forgiveness and told her all he knew about Claire's perplexing failure of the medical exam.

Wally replied, "But I don't understand it. She looked after me the whole crossing from Liverpool and never said anything about being ill. Does she have a condition she didn't tell me about?"

"No, nothing. Gwer and I can't understand it. Gwer used his connections to get the waiver from the Mayor after saying he would meet any of his sister's medical expenses. He handed it off to me in Portsmouth and I dashed to the pier."

Sean told her about his difficulties getting aboard the ship but then his narrative veered from the truth. He was uneasy about the strange Vanderbilt cargo and Wally's potential involvement. He carefully watched her reaction to his narrative, but she gave nothing away.

"I saw Ewan on the pier loading the horses so I rushed over and explained that I had to get on the ship."

"So he's not really ill, then?"

"No. I lied about that. He agreed to let me go in his place so I could come aboard and find Claire. When I discovered you were on board, I knew you would help."

"Of course I will help. Show me the waiver from the Mayor."

Sean pulled the letter from his pocket and studied Wally as she read it. She seemed unaware of anything unusual about the horsebox. She had easily accepted his lie about Ewan giving up his place voluntarily. If she were involved in a plot with Ewan she would have challenged his story.

"Well, Sean," Wally said when she finished reading the waiver, "let's pay a visit to the infirmary, shall we? Let's get to the bottom of this failed health inspection."

"Yes, please," he said with gratitude and relief.

Chapter Two – The Crossing

New York City, June 1911 (Four Years Earlier)

Alfred was shaken awake by a cold hand. The intrusion forced his scattered wits to gather, albeit slowly. His left eye, freed of the pillow, blinked into focus. The hand was small and delicate. Lifting his head to bring the other eye into play, he followed a slender arm up to a pretty, oval face. *Ah, that face!* It was an attractive face; reassuring, smooth and framing a fine pair of curved, full lips, which were moving.

Alfred raised his head to further muster his faculties. His black hair tumbled across his forehead, just touching the brows over his large, brown eyes. It had been a rough night. Having deduced who *she* was, where *he* was quickly followed. Oh yes, he thought, here again.

“Your man,” she repeated. “He’s here. Downstairs. Come to get you for your ship, loverboy.”

She smiled as she straightened her posture but remained perched on the bed. “Seems you got places to go.”

“What time is it?” he said, suddenly sitting up in the bed and shaking his head.

“Reckon it’s close to nine,” she answered lazily as she inspected the back of one hand, the words tumbling slowly from her ample lips.

“Jesus wept! Ship sails at ten,” Alfred cried as he turned away from her. He threw back the sheets and jumped out of bed. He was naked but that caused him no discomfort. He was proud of his well-proportioned body, which at thirty-three still retained the hard tone of an athlete. He was not a man uncomfortable naked – or uncomfortable, full stop, for that matter.

He knew she was watching as he hurried towards the jumble of black and white that occupied a chair. Rifling through it, he extracted and donned a pair of white undershorts. Then he shook a white shirt violently before punching his arms through the sleeves.

He was looking around the large room frantically when she said calmly at his side, “I have them.”

She opened a hand to reveal a pair of sparkling, sapphire cufflinks. “Let me help you,” she said.

He forced himself to stand still as she fastened the jewelled cufflinks, annoyed by her lack of urgency.

He felt, more than heard, her laughing. She was enjoying this shambolic spectacle: Alfred diving back into his evening clothes in a mad rush in the cold light of morning.

At last she finished and he pulled on his trousers impatiently, then his waistcoat and jacket. He reached into his breast pocket for the familiar touch of lizard and withdrew his wallet. He rifled through the bills, selected a few, and put them on the dresser between the tall windows.

“Really, Alfred, I am an employed actress. That isn’t necessary.”

“I know that, my dear. Just a gift to a friend. Do something nice for yourself.”

She looked at the stack of notes on the dresser and said, “And that’s far too much.”

“Then give some away,” he suggested with a smile.

She sighed, “I suppose you do have your reputation to consider. What did that paper call you: the freest-spending dandy of the age?”

But he didn’t hear her. He was looking around the room for his top hat. He found it lodged on the floor beside the dresser.

Hat in hand, he approached her, administered a quick kiss, placed the hat on his head and was gone. She sank onto the bed and let her eyes drift over to the windows as she listened to her closing door and Alfred’s footsteps fading down the stairs. She stared at the curtains as they were pushed into the room and then pulled away again by the draft. To and fro, to and fro. Same as me, she thought.

Alfred’s quick descent into the plush lobby was met with a cheerful “Good morning, sir” from his valet. Ronald Denyer stood waiting for him at the bottom of the wide staircase. Denyer was crisp and pleasant, as always.

“Is it?” Alfred joked.

“Yes,” Denyer affirmed, cocking his head in a gesture well known to Alfred through years of loyal service. “And a fine day to set sail, sir.”

Denyer motioned towards the double doors that two bellmen were pulling open.

“Which one this time, Denyer?” Alfred said.

“The *Lusitania*, sir.”

Alfred passed through the doors and blinked as he confronted the bright, morning sunlight. Two, three blinks, and his eyes found the familiar outline of his maroon automobile pulled up at the curb. He walked towards the sound of the gently rumbling engine.

Suddenly the middle part of the car moved! *What the devil?* Then Alfred spied a human face amidst the maroon. The chauffeur had been invisible in the matching maroon uniform until he opened the door.

“Morning, sir,” the chauffeur said stiffly as Alfred ducked into the car. Strangely dark, Alfred thought. *Why are the curtains drawn?* Then he saw the fresh clothes in a neat pile. It was as if, after an evening on display, Alfred had been returned to a velvet jewel box for safekeeping.

Denyer waited.

“Denyer, get in here and help me with this,” Alfred said, pretending to be annoyed.

“Yes, sir,” Denyer answered, pulling down one of the reverse-facing seats as the chauffeur closed the door.

“Straight to Pier 54 then?” Alfred asked.

"I'm afraid so, sir," Denyer answered. "But we do have time for this."

Denyer lifted a cloth to reveal a tray with two pots, some instruments and a stack of white towels monogrammed with a gold V.

"What devilry is this, Denyer?" Alfred laughed.

"Forgive me, sir, but your sisters are also sailing with you today. I thought perhaps a shave?"

"You are a marvel, Denyer."

Alfred cocked his head and asked, "Sisters? Plural? I thought it was only Gladys."

"Message came for you last night, sir. Gertrude is sailing with you today also."

"Christ! Well that settles it. I am not facing *her* without a shave. Get on with it, then."

"Yes, sir," Denyer said as he reached forward to help Alfred out of his jacket. Stripped to his shirt and with the top buttons loosed, Alfred sat still while Denyer expertly foamed his scruff and produced a straight razor.

"Denyer, for God's sake, you are not coming near me in this light. Crack a curtain a bit. I doubt the reporters have found me yet."

"As you wish, sir," Denyer reluctantly obeyed. He pulled the front curtains slightly ajar to admit light from the chauffeur's compartment. The chauffeur turned his head for instructions but Denyer waved him back to staring at the ornament that adorned the long, rumbling hood.

Denyer attacked Alfred's stubble and moments later, as Alfred dried himself on a monogrammed towel, Denyer knocked the razor handle on the glass of the chauffeur's compartment. With a nod, the chauffeur pulled the great car away from the curb as Denyer helped Alfred out of the previous evening's shirt and trousers.



Wally forced a smile and said, "Pleased to meet you. I am Walburga Schwabe."

If Father were alive, he would tell me that was zu steif. Relax and try again. Friendlier.

"Hello, my name is Wally Schwabe. I am travelling to Germany to attend school."

A corner of her mouth ticked upward. *Much better.*

"Freut mich, Sie kennenzulernen. Ich heisse Walburga Schwabe."

An unruly curl that escaped from the despised hat was quickly subjugated. She clenched her jaw at the child's hat that reeked of compromise. *Why can't I have a lady's hat?* The one her sister, Gladys, forced on her would prevent anyone taking her seriously. Those that had somehow overlooked the missing, forbidden lipstick.

There was a knock on the door. She ignored it until it came with an admonishment.

“Wally, what are you doing in there? You are making us late!”

“All right!” she yelled to her sister. To the mirror, she said, “I am so looking forward to the crossing.”

Stupid hat.

Wally paused by the open window to look at the ship that would extricate her from her sister’s stern rule. Wally had been living in Philadelphia with her sister, her sister’s husband Paul and their five children since her father died the previous year.

From the fourth floor window of the hotel, Wally had a good view of the superstructure of the great liner. Four massive funnels painted red with black tops were stacked like toys. The proud prow dropped straight behind the roof of the pier building, which boasted in massive white letters: CUNARD LINES.

Uncle Rhed’s company.

Wally had happily adopted her brother-in-law’s childhood name for Alfred Booth, chairman of Cunard Lines. Paul had called Booth Uncle Rhed since he was a boy on account of the rogue red hairs that appeared in his beard. Young Paul insisting on spelling his pet name for his uncle with a bonus h and that’s how the chairman of Cunard Lines became known to Wally and her sister.

Wally completed her final inspection in the bathroom mirror.

Stupid hat!

She angled the despised headwear further to the right and emerged guiltily from the bathroom.

Her sister Gladys glared at her and said, “My dear, you are making it seem as if Paul was actually right putting us in this horrible hotel by the pier!”

“Oh dear,” Wally replied with mock horror. Despite their fourteen-year difference in age, Wally had more natural confidence than her older sister and she used it to her advantage.

Gladys said to her, “I do wish you could be slightly less enthusiastic about leaving us!”

“Oh, I am sorry,” Wally said as she took her sister’s hands between her own. “Oh course I shall miss you and Paul and the little darlings. You have been so kind to me since Papa died. I am just excited about spending the summer with Uncle Rhed and then starting school in Potsdam.”

“I blame Papa and all this reading of German philosophers but never mind,” Gladys continued. “At least you will be studying art history, something suitable for a young lady.”

Wally rolled her eyes.

Her brother-in-law Paul said from the doorway, “We must be going or the gangway will be withdrawn. Then we shall have to catapult Wally on to the deck in a most unladylike fashion.”

Wally smiled at the idea of being catapulted, even if it meant the demise of her new travelling suit.

Gladys smoothed her dress and said, “The Captain has agreed to

meet us, given Uncle Rhed's position. I do think it is extremely nice of him to put you in first class when we booked you in second."

Your mistake booking me in second class, Wally thought, but kept silent. *What is the point of being the niece of the chairman of Cunard Lines if you don't travel saloon class?*

Paul was a partner in Alfred Booth & Company, managing the company's interests in Philadelphia. Uncle Rhed had forsaken the family business founded by his father and uncle to work for larger rival Cunard Lines, eventually becoming its chairman.

Although Uncle Rhed was not really her uncle, Wally was happy to exploit Paul's connection to extract herself from her sister's feigned modesty and into saloon class where she belonged. Paul's father was really Booth's cousin, but Wally took up Paul's childhood name for Alfred Booth and joined in calling him Uncle Rhed. Despite Paul's occasional usefulness as an ally, Wally dismissed him as a pawn of her older sister.

"They call her the Greyhound of the Seas, you know," Paul said, looking out of the window at the *Lusitania*.

"I didn't," Wally said peevishly, winning her a disapproving look from Gladys.



Ten minutes later, they were across the street on the pier. Wally watched with envy the saloon class ladies with enormous hats emerging from a row of carriages and automobiles. Smartly uniformed crew escorted them with exaggerated politeness through the building and outside again. The sight of the ship at its moorings awed even experienced travellers.

Before them, the razor prow of floating steel rose sixty feet out of the water. The sharp forward edge towered over them. Near the top, proud gold letters spelled L U S I T A N I A against the band of white paint that delineated where the black hull ended and the superstructure began.

Wally, Gladys and Paul were struck silent by their insignificance beside this mechanical mass. At nearly eight hundred feet, the *Lusitania* was so long the slip in which she had been built was angled to permit her launch into the River Clyde.

Three gangways connected the ship to the pier. The hats of the ladies made it clear which one was for saloon class. The most luxurious suites for the five-day crossing cost two thousand pounds, more than three times the average worker's annual wage.

Wally, Gladys and Paul mounted the stairs to the crisp white gangway that stretched over the chaos below. Wally grew more excited with each step towards the large hole that gaped in the black hull. Two decks higher, white paint marked where the Shelter Deck rose above the hull. Beyond the superstructure, one of the massive black funnels stretched skyward, its red top in the heavens.

Wally stopped to look below at the bustling commotion on the pier. To feed her passengers and crew for the five-day crossing, the ship's Lower Deck had already been loaded with the meat of hundreds of pigs, oxen, calves, sheep, lambs, turkeys, ducks, geese, pheasants, pigeons and thousands of other fowl. Five thousand tons of coal had been loaded by hand, shovel-load by shovel-load, into the coal bunkers that surrounded the four boiler rooms.

Gladys beckoned for her and Wally followed her sister and Paul past the massive steel door into Saloon Class reception. A steward in a white uniform with black cording greeted them. Over-eager, Wally thought dismissively. His eagerness was forgiven when Wally saw the deference shown to her brother-in-law Paul Crompton. The staff had evidently been briefed to expect the nephew of the chairman.

A moment later, Wally looked up to see the Captain approaching, the over-eager steward in his wake. Captain Dow was the perfect specimen of a sea captain. He had a competent, authoritative face and a generous girth his white uniform struggled to contain.

Captain Dow doffed his cap and extended an oddly plump white hand. "Pleasure to welcome you aboard the *Lusitania*."

"Thank you, Captain," Wally replied. Gladys glared at her younger sister for presuming to speak first. Wally was oblivious.

"I am Wally Schwabe, this is my sister Gladys and her husband Paul." Then she added, "Crompton," just in case there was any doubt he was the nephew of the chairman.

Paul beamed with pleasure as he shook the Captain's hand. "I am thrilled to be on her at last."

"This is your first time aboard?"

"Shockingly, yes. When I cross it's always on one of our own steamers. I am afraid Booth & Company has nothing to compare with the *Lusitania*."

The Captain rescued his hand from Paul and said, "Though not strictly by the rules, please take a look around but listen for the All Ashore That's Going Ashore call."

Gladys replied coolly, "Thank you, Captain, but we are happy to abide by the rules and be off. We have small children that require our attention."

Wally could see Paul was crestfallen. *How appalling that Gladys would deny Paul the opportunity to explore the Lusitania. Thank God I take after Papa.*

With a courteous smile, Gladys embraced Wally and made a show of dabbing her handkerchief to her eyes as she took Paul's arm. Paul broke away long enough to kiss Wally goodbye and say, "Enjoy her. She's a remarkable ship."

When Wally turned back the Captain had gone. In his place, was the eager crew member.

"Miss Booth? Or is it Crompton?"

"What? Oh no, well, not exactly," she replied. Wally arched her right eyebrow in a gesture those familiar with her knew meant she was amused.

"Actually, my surname is Schwabe."

"But you are the niece of Alfred Booth, are you not?"

"Yes," she acquiesced to this half-truth.

"I am Jones, your steward for the trip. It is my pleasure to welcome aboard the niece of our esteemed chairman."

Wally was enjoying the attention and had no intention of ending it by informing Jones or anyone else that it was really only her sister's husband who was related to the august chairman of the line.

"Allow me to show you to your cabin," Jones said with an exaggerated bow. "Please ring me any time you require, day or night."

Wally speculated how long it would take Jones to swap his nightshirt for his uniform. *A mischievous push to the buzzer some evening ought to answer the question.*

Jones said to Wally, "After you get settled, I suggest you make your way to the Boat Deck for our departure. You may prefer to go one deck higher, to the Sun Deck, for an even better view. The port side will give you the best views of New York as we steam down the Hudson. Streamers are available on the deck for you to toss to the onlookers."

Wally grinned in anticipation of tossing multicoloured coils of farewells to America and its constraints.

"And the Captain has invited you to dine at his table this evening," added the steward.

"Well Jones, I am honoured, but honestly, I hope everyone won't make such a fuss over me. I want to be treated just like everyone else," she lied.

"On the *Lusitania*, we make a fuss over everyone."

Jones led Wally into a large, white passageway where other first-timers were gawking at the opulence. White columns at regular intervals created a comfortable rhythm around the room. Gold gilt brought out the delicate detailing of the column capitals and delineated the perimeter of the ceiling.

Wally saw the ornate metal cage and exclaimed, "Elevators!"

"Yes," said Jones proudly. "One of the first steamers to have them. Electric powered, of course. Would you like to ride?"

"Oh no. Stairs this time. I want to see everything!"

"On a ship we call the stairs a companionway. It's three floors up to the Promenade Deck and your cabin."

Wally was already mounting the companionway, all the while inspecting the mechanical wonder of the exposed elevators. Each tread brought her closer to her new European life. She knew her father would be proud of her. His death last year had been so much worse than her mother's the year before. Her mother had taken years to die. By contrast, her father's sudden heart attack had been devastating.

Jones announced, "Just here, Miss Booth, I mean Schwabe; the Promenade Deck."

Well-dressed passengers milled about; a harried steward acknowledged Jones with a nod. Jones led the way down a corridor and stopped at a polished door, which he opened before presenting Wally with the key. He pushed a button to illuminate the cabin with electric

light. Wally inspected with satisfaction the beautiful room that was all hers with no Gladys and no Paul.

The walls were panelled in a medium dark wood she couldn't identify, which frustrated her. She was confident the lighter detailing was oak. Her father had taught her to recognise most woods; now it was a game she played alone. The thin line of oak, embellished with tiny leaves, ran around the bulkheads exaggerating the doorways and ports as if proud of them.

On one wall was a modern sink and beside it a neat stack of towels, each emblazoned with a red flag. A bud vase with a single white rose was suspended in a device that could pivot in high seas. With obvious pride in the *Lusitania*, Jones revealed the wonder of a private water closet and instructed a grateful Wally on its operations.

"Some of the suites have a shower built over the bathtub. The very latest, with jets that surround you," Jones enthused. He described to Wally the amenities that fostered *Lusitania's* reputation for luxury. "Demand was so great for saloon accommodation that the *Lusitania* was redesigned to increase the number of saloon cabins."

Jones parted by saying, "Later, when we are underway, I would be happy to give you a tour of the ship."

"Oh yes, please!" Wally said at once. "I have heard so much about the *Lusitania*, particularly from my know-it-all brother-in-law."

Jones laughed. "Well, she is an astonishing ship, as you will see. She has many admirers, apparently including your brother-in-law. Ring me any time. The first transatlantic trip is frightening for many people, particularly a young woman travelling alone."

"Well, Jones, I don't think we need to worry about that but I gladly accept your offer of a tour of the ship later. Particularly the parts I can't explore on my own," she added with a sheepish grin.

"I'll see what I can do," Jones bowed out of the cabin and closed the door.

A few minutes later a crew member arrived with her luggage and also the unwelcome uncertainty of how much to tip him. Wally extracted a few coins nervously and, without counting, pressed them into his hand, wishing he would go away.

Wally abandoned her unpacking to go on deck for the departure from New York, wearing the hat she had forgotten to despise. The passageways were filled with nervous energy and she flowed up to the Boat Deck in a sea of excited passengers.

She caught her first glance of the saloon class rooms, which had shocked the seafaring elite during the *Lusitania's* maiden voyage in 1907. In her excitement, Wally was struggling to maintain what Gladys called a ladylike composure. She passed outdoors into the sunshine on deck.

Sunshine; that meant she was facing south. The ship's prow was towards the pier, so that must be the starboard side. *Port* had the same number of letters as *left*, that's what her father always said. She was on the wrong side of the ship!

Wally re-entered the companionway that cut across the saloon rooms and emerged on the other side to a crowded deck, confirming Jones was correct about the preferred side for leaving New York. She spied a narrow space beside two women and seized it by taking hold of the railing with both hands.



“He is hopeless, just hopeless!” one of the women beside Wally exclaimed to her companion as they looked out over the pier. Wally was surprised and tried not to listen.

“Gertrude,” the younger woman replied. “He doesn’t have your strength. He never needed it until Papa died and then he wasn’t ready.”

“You’re always apologising for him. This is ridiculous! The ship is departing in ten minutes and he’s nowhere to be seen. Infuriating!” the older woman snapped.

Wally could not help overhearing them despite her unconvincing effort to appear otherwise.

“Well,” the one named Gertrude continued, “it serves him right if he misses the boat. He’s probably up to no good; bound to be a horse or a woman.”

“Gertrude!” the younger sister pleaded. “He’s not a villain. He just donated a horse ambulance to London.”

When Wally heard this she listened more intently. She was a keen horsewoman and intrigued at the idea of an ambulance for horses.

“Honestly Gladys, you are too easy on him.” Wally registered the name of the younger woman since it was the same as her sister’s. “A horse ambulance, what nonsense! Who donates an ambulance for horses instead of people? Every paper is filled with his indiscretions. The way they describe him no young woman is safe.”

“Gertrude, you know those reports are exaggerated.”

“No young woman is safe!” Gertrude said again. “Perhaps we need to warn this young woman,” she said, looking at Wally. Much to her dismay, Wally suddenly found herself pulled into the conversation.

Gertrude asked her, “Are you travelling alone, my dear? You look rather young for that.”

“I beg your pardon?” Wally stammered, embarrassed.

“Are you travelling alone?” Gertrude repeated impatiently.

“Well, yes ma’am,” Wally regained enough composure to answer. “I am.”

“Well just look out, there may be roguish men aboard,” Gertrude said sternly.

The younger woman came to Wally’s rescue. “Don’t worry, my sister is teasing you.”

“I am?” said Gertrude with mock indignity.

“You are perfectly safe,” the younger woman assured Wally.

“Since Alfred missed the boat,” Gertrude added.

The other woman said to Wally, “Please forgive my sister Gertrude, who seems to think our brother would have found you attractive.”

“You won’t meet our brother in any case as he has missed the boat.”

Extending her hand to Wally she introduced herself, “I am Gertrude Whitney and this is my sister Gladys, or Countess Széchenyi,” she said, exaggerating the pronunciation of her sister’s title to tease her.

The Countess extended her hand, frowned playfully at Gertrude, and said to their new acquaintance, “Please call me Gladys. Don’t mind my sister. She considers all men a nuisance.”

“Too right!” Gertrude exclaimed. “Particularly when you’re married to them or related to them and can’t be shed of them!”

The Countess ignored her sister and asked, “What is your name?”

“I am Walburga Schwabe, but please call me Wally. I shan’t forget your name as it is the same as my sister’s.”

The Countess smiled and asked, “Are you travelling to London?”

“To Liverpool. I am spending the summer with my uncle before continuing to Germany for school.”

The Countess said, “Ah, I live in Vienna. My German has come a long way but László still teases me sometimes. What will you study?”

“Art history.”

“Aha,” the Countess laughed. She turned to her sister and said, “Well Gertrude, now you have someone you can speak art with.”

Turning back to Wally, she explained, “My sister is an art historian as well as a sculptress and painter.”

Wally looked at Gertrude’s stern features with a new appreciation. Gertrude returned her gaze evenly, then after an uncomfortable interval said, “Indeed, we must find some time to talk.”

Wally nodded, trying to hide her nervousness.

The Countess suddenly shouted, “Look!”

She pointed to a large maroon limousine driving up the pier and tooting its horn to dispel those in its path. People moved out of the way, craning to see which big shot was arriving so late in the large automobile.

“The rascal!” Gertrude said, shaking her head, but her smile gave her away. Wally could see that she was pleased that her brother was going to make the ship after all. The three of them watched the commotion as a swarm of uniformed crew enveloped the car.

A tall well-dressed gentleman stepped past the chauffeur and grinned as he took in the bulk of the *Lusitania*. Shielding his eyes from the light, he looked up at the passengers that lined the decks, and waved.

“He can’t possibly see us,” Gertrude said. “He’s just getting attention,” she muttered, but this did not stop the Countess frantically waving until the man did, at last, appear to see them.

With a gallant sweep he removed his hat and bowed. Wally could not stifle a laugh.

A steward directed him with urgency to the hastily returned gangway.

His valet followed with a small valise while crew members descended feverishly on the luggage attached to the back of the automobile.

"That's our brother," Gertrude said. "And he is likely to find you very interesting so just be careful," she said with a pointed finger.

"Come now, he's not that bad," the Countess defended him. "His life hasn't been the easiest."

"Hah!" Gertrude retorted, "The world's greatest millionaire playboy. A wastrel."

"Gertrude says that, but she has more of a soft spot for him than anybody. After all, she's the only one he listens to."

Gertrude said flatly, "I am the only one who doesn't mollycoddle him, that's why. I tell it like it is, with him as well as with everyone else."

Wally was certain this was true. She examined the clothes of her new acquaintances and noticed for the first time the fine materials and fashionable cut. Then she noticed the jewels. Gertrude wore a jet black, rectangular brooch with a single pavé ruby in the middle and a perimeter of sparkling diamonds with a large pearl at each corner. The Countess wore a simple strand of enormous pearls and over her glove an emerald ring with diamonds.

The ship's steam whistle let out a long, single blast. They cringed but Wally secretly welcomed the deafening roar that confirmed her escape from America. Tugboats pushed the liner into the Hudson and Wally got her first view of the Manhattan skyline.

The Countess noticed her rapturous gaze and remarked, "Wonderful, isn't it?"

"Oh yes," Wally replied. "I never dreamed a city could be so large. What is that?" she said, pointing to a building that soared over the rest. Gertrude answered, "Singer Building. Tallest in the world."

"Well, I should think so," Wally said, making both her older companions laugh.

As the *Lusitania* made its way towards the harbour, Wally waved to the crowds on the shore. When a steward passed with a basket of paper streamers she eagerly seized a handful.

There was a commotion behind them and Wally turned to see the Countess embrace a handsome man with a moustache. Noticing Wally and assuming she was part of the party, the gentleman extended his hand and addressed Wally.

"Hello. I'm Alfred Vanderbilt."

"Walburga Schwabe, but please call me Wally."

"And you are travelling with my sisters?"

"Oh, no," Wally stammered, flustered.

"We just met her, Alfred," Gertrude explained.

"She is travelling alone," the Countess said, instantly regretting it. She tried rectifying the situation by adding, "We propose to adopt her."

"To protect her," Gertrude said to Alfred. With a stern look and a waving finger, she said, "Off limits."

"What can you mean?" Alfred replied with an ingratiating smile.

The steward Jones walked past and said, "Ah, Miss Booth, I mean, Miss Schwabe, glad to see you found a good view for the departure."

"Yes, thank you, Jones."

"Booth?" Alfred inquired.

"A mistake. My uncle's name."

"Ah."

He was obviously interested, so Wally ventured, "Alfred Booth."

She was rewarded by Alfred's asking, "Of Cunard Lines?"

"Yes," she answered. An instinct of self-preservation led her to disclose, "My sister married his nephew and I live with them. I am going to spend the summer with Uncle Rhed, that's what we call him, in Liverpool."

"I am sure we will have a smooth crossing with the niece of the chairman aboard."

Gertrude and the Countess took another look at Wally. Wally hoped her connection to the chairman of the line might obviate her lack of jewels.

"And how are your cabins? Comfortable?" Alfred asked his sisters.

"Boat Deck, adjoining rooms. Very comfortable, thank you," the Countess said.

Gertrude looked at him and said accusingly, "I suppose you are on the Promenade Deck?"

Alfred nodded.

"Let me guess," Gertrude frowned. "Regal Suite? Oh Alfred, you are impossible!"

"There is another one in case you want it," he defended himself. "I'm not selfish. I just like to entertain."

"As every newspaper in the country likes to point out," Gertrude said.

Wally stopped listening and turned her attention to the rolling panorama dominated by the bulbous Singer Building. The port deck eventually swung into shade as the ship made its eastward course to the Atlantic. The sisters made their farewells, regrettably taking the intriguing Alfred with them, but not before he kissed Wally's hand with mock gallantry.



Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1909



Wally finished unpacking and then pushed the button to summon the enthusiastic Jones.

“Jones, how about that tour?”

“Of course. Wynn can cover my bells for a bit. We should begin with the saloon rooms on the Boat Deck; the finest rooms afloat without dispute, at least until the *Titanic* starts service next year.”

Jones insisted Wally experience the electric lift. The attendant closed the outer and inner grills before ascending with an incredulous Wally. She was mesmerised by the companionway with passengers that spiralled around them.

On leaving the lift, Wally paused to look back at the ornate metal grillwork that capped this marvellous invention. Five circular ornaments erupted from the miniature roof amid a riot of smaller scrolls, swags and curvilinear pieces – all of gleaming, polished brass.

“It’s like a giant bird cage,” she said to Jones.

“Only you can get out when you want,” he replied.

“Well, I certainly hope so,” Wally replied, her shoulders tensing at the thought of being trapped inside.

The ocean was visible at both ends of the passageway but to her left the light of the late afternoon sun danced on the water.

Jones pointed to the right, saying, “Port side first.”

Wally checked herself again: *left* has four letters, *port* has four letters.

“Jones,” she said suddenly, “isn’t port on the left?”

Jones smiled and said, “Not if you’re walking to stern.”

She laughed, “Of course, how stupid of me.”

Wally gasped when she realised how far the saloon class rooms extended towards the stern. From her vantage point she had an uninterrupted vista through several large rooms.

Jones guided her in the opposite direction, towards the bow. “First, let me show you the Writing Room and Library.”

They stepped into a beautiful, white room with four slender columns on high bases that supported beams running fore to aft, breaking the room into three distinct sections. The middle section was bordered along the stern end by an enormous wooden bookcase. Behind hexagonal panes of glass were rows of neatly arranged books.

Wally was inspecting the architectural details of the wide bookcase when she made the surprising discovery that it lacked any depth. The ornamental scroll atop the bookcase was attached to the wall and the entire bookcase was built into it.

Rose-coloured carpet and grey silk wall panels completed the harmonious room. Chairs for reading received ample light from the domed skylight while writing desks benefited from placement near the large ports. A few passengers were already writing letters on the stationery emblazoned with an image of the *Lusitania* and the Cunard logo.

Jones led Wally back through the passageway and into the saloon class Lounge and Music Room. Wally had glimpsed the room briefly but now she had time to look more closely at the mahogany walls with gilt detailing. This room was also very light due to the large barrel skylight overhead.

Upholstered armchairs and smaller Queen Anne chairs were grouped as if already engaged in polite conversation. Shells, fish and crabs cavorted about the plasterwork overhead, which also featured a little girl with seaweed in her hair.

“Plasterwork rather than carved wood as it is much lighter,” Jones explained.

The barrel vault of leaded glass stretched the length of the room and featured twelve curved panels.

“The months of the year?” Wally asked.

“Well done! That one is October. See the colours and the pumpkin?”

The glazed vault terminated in a heavy, wooden chimneypiece that appeared weighty enough to steady the room in the highest seas. In its centre was a colourful enamel of a woman’s face in profile.

Jones said, "The Glory of the Sunrise. And that one," he pointed to the opposite chimneypiece, "is The Conquest of the Sea."

"Thank you, Jones," she said. Satisfied with this information, Wally walked into one of the semi-circular areas that protruded on to the deck and noticed a metal line along the carpet.

"Rails," Jones explained. "They keep the furniture settled in heavy seas. Now, for the forbidden part."

With a wink, Jones led Wally past the massive Broadwood grand piano. She eyed it jealously, hoping she might have a chance to play it during the voyage. After checking, Jones signalled for Wally to follow him into the next room.

"The men's Smoking Lounge."

Wally inspected the forbidden sanctuary. It also had a massive barrel vault of skylights surrounded by plasterwork, although it was more restrained than the Music Room. The panelling was simpler in design but richer in tone and Wally was struggling to identify the wood when Jones spoke.

"Italian walnut. Beautiful, isn't it?" Jones asked.

"Yes," she agreed.

"Is that a working fireplace?" she said, pointing to a coal scuttle with a shovel.

Jones smiled, "Well spotted. The only one on board. Burns coal and vents through the fourth funnel."

In place of the green carpeting and curtains of the Music Room, the Smoking Lounge was largely maroon with a carpet of browns and reds. The chairs were simpler and more masculine than those in the lounge. Wally liked this room and it annoyed her that it was the exclusive preserve of men.

Jones beckoned her to follow and they went through a passageway into a bright room. It spanned the width of the boat, was glazed on both sides and completely open at the back. An enormous skylight showed the golden light of late afternoon.

"The Veranda Café," Jones announced.

"Just how I imagine Paris will be." Wally clapped her hands together. There were wicker chairs and tables and a trellis with vines, potted palms and hanging baskets. Plants even grew up the columns that supported the ceiling. Some passengers were taking their afternoon tea, the ladies' hats bobbing with the stories they were telling.

Jones led Wally down a companionway on the starboard side. He revealed a small room with a large black leather chair and a white and black tiled floor. Wally pushed past him and hopped into the barber's chair.

"A shave please, Jones!" she cried as she threw her head back.

"Come on," Jones said, waving her out of the chair.

They continued their journey up the Promenade Deck to the enclosed forward observation area near the bow.

"This is where you should come to watch the storms. Safer than on deck."

Wally looked towards the prow with its forward mast and gigantic spools waiting for equally giant chain thread. The ocean obediently slid past on either side of the ship's narrow prow.

"And the bridge is directly above us?" Wally asked.

"Two floors higher. On the Sun Deck. I probably ought to get back to relieve Wynn and anyway you should experience the dining room at the Captain's table."

"Thank you Jones, I'm sure you're right."

They parted company and Wally walked astern until she emerged on to the wide Promenade Deck. She watched the first colours of the sunset before returning to her cabin to dress for dinner.



Wally's elation at escaping from under her sister's thumb gave way to despair when she had to select an outfit for dinner at the Captain's table without guidance from Gladys. She emerged from her cabin feigning confidence she hoped was more convincing than it felt. She squared her shoulders and joined the flow of passengers making their way towards the main companionway.

Wally caught the elevator down with a gentleman in his early forties who had thinning hair swept far back from his forehead, a grey twirled moustache and a monocle. He was accompanied by a thin, elegant, woman whose pinched features seemed fixed on the corner of the brass cage.

As they exited the lift, Wally found herself pulled into the saloon class dining room that spanned the width of the ship. It was truly astonishing with white walls that shimmered like enamel, making it seem even larger. Architectural details were picked out in gilt. The abundant mirrors and enormous dome overhead made Wally feel she had already arrived in Europe. Wally was privately amused that instead of clipped formal gardens surrounding this Louis XV interior there was only endless, churning sea.

In the centre of the room, a circle of columns framed an opening through which the upper tier of the salon was visible. Wally stepped forward to look at the domed ceiling seventy feet overhead. Four brightly coloured murals contrasted with the white interior in a burst of Boucher exuberance. *The four seasons?* Wally searched for clues and then realised with embarrassment the headwaiter was requesting her name.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I am Walburga Schwabe."

"Ah, Miss Schwabe, the chairman's niece. Please follow me to the Captain's table."

Wally followed him to a large oval table in the middle of the room that shared the orientation of the ship. Its bow end was under a ceiling but the stern was directly under the dome. The steward swivelled a chair and held it for Wally before allowing it to twist her back again to face the table.

“How clever!” Wally remarked, twirling the chair playfully before stopping with some embarrassment. Across the table sat the woman from the elevator with the same pinched look. Wally realised with panic that the monocled gentleman was seated beside her.

The man introduced himself, saying with a German accent, “Good evening. I am Johann von Bernstorff and this is my wife Jeanne.”

“I am Walburga Schwabe, please call me Wally.”

“Ah, a German name,” he responded. “I am German and my wife is American. Are you travelling alone?” he asked.

“Yes. I am visiting my uncle in Liverpool before starting my studies in Potsdam.”

Von Bernstorff brightened. “Potsdam? Excellent. Which school?”

“The Ladies College.”

“I know it well. An excellent school. You will meet some fine young ladies there. In fact, you may even meet Princess Viktoria Luise, the Kaiser’s daughter.”

Wally nodded politely, doubtful she would be hobnobbing with the Princess. She was pleased to see the Vanderbilt trio being shown to seats further down the Captain’s table but close enough to exchange pleasantries. Wally noticed that Alfred and the German man knew one another but their greeting was polite rather than friendly. She remembered her father saying listen for what is unsaid; it is often more interesting than what is said.

Conversation stopped with the arrival of the Captain, who made his way around the table greeting his guests. When he took his seat next to Wally, he said, “I see you have met Count Bernstorff, the German Ambassador, and his wife.”

“The German Ambassador?”

“Yes. We are pleased to have him aboard since the *Lusitania* is the ship that regained the Blue Riband from the German steamers.” The Captain winked at Bernstorff. Wally was dumbfounded as to why Alfred would be cool to the German Ambassador.

“It’s von Bernstorff, but thank you Captain, pleased to be aboard again,” the German Ambassador said. “But the *Mauretania* holds the Blue Riband now, isn’t that right?” von Bernstorff asked with satisfaction.

“Yes, the younger sister. She took it from the *Lusitania* two years ago but we’ll get it back,” the Captain said. “The two sisters have traded the title back and forth since their launch.”

The German Ambassador took a few moments to extol the glories of the new Hamburg-America *Imperator* before saying to the Captain, “Soon you will have the Americans to contend with. The *Titanic* launched last week.”

Wally recalled her brother-in-law Paul saying something similar.

“Well, White Star may be owned by J.P. Morgan,” the Captain said to the Ambassador, “...but they still fly the Union Jack. I am not convinced the *Titanic* will be a match for the Greyhound of the Seas. Her triple screw design means only three funnels were necessary but they added

a fake funnel to reassure passengers she could compete with the four-funnelled Cunarders. What does that tell you?" joked the Captain.

Oh yes, Wally thought, just like Paul with that Greyhound of the Seas nonsense, but the recollection of her afternoon tour tempered her cynicism and she listened to the Captain more attentively.

"The *Titanic* will be eight hundred and eighty-two feet, so roughly ninety feet longer than the *Lusitania*," the Captain continued. "They may well find that we have already determined the most efficient size for a ship designed for speed. Steam turbine engines were the only solution capable of getting the *Lusitania* the sixty-eight thousand horsepower she needs. She's got to have that to achieve the twenty-six knots required to satisfy the contracts for delivering the royal mail."

Wally grew bored of the men's conversation until Alfred joined in with a question to the Captain.

"How do they test the shape for speed?"

"They build a model and test it in a wave tank. The Admiralty helped determine the most efficient hull for the *Lusitania*."

Wally interrupted the men's conversation, asking the Captain, "Why would the Admiralty test the *Lusitania*?"

The Captain was pleased Wally had been paying attention, despite her blushed cheeks. He answered, "The *Lusitania* and her twin the *Mauretania* were built using loans from the British government."

The German Ambassador cut in, "Some would say an unfair advantage."

Wally sat up in her chair. She sensed they were straying on to dangerous territory and it excited her.

The Captain did not rise to the bait. "£2.8 million of government loans to Cunard Lines financed the ships. That was during Lord Pirie's time before your uncle was chairman. In exchange, the taxpayers have the right to use both ships in the event of war. She may be the most luxurious ship afloat, but every inch of her design was approved by the Admiralty."

"The *Lusitania* could fight in a war?" Wally asked.

The Captain laughed, "Well, that may prove unlikely. She would be the fastest troop transport the world has ever seen but also the most expensive. She is, however, listed as an Auxiliary Cruiser, which I suspect the Ambassador knows."

"All too well," the Ambassador replied drily. "Ship building is the nemesis of diplomats these days. Since the dreadnoughts we have been forced to learn gross tonnages and displacement."

Wally was bewildered until the Ambassador explained, "The Kaiser has a passion for shipbuilding. The launch of the HMS *Dreadnought* by the British navy in 1906 rendered all other naval vessels obsolete. Now we are under pressure to keep up."

"But why?" Wally asked naively. "Why do you need to keep up?"

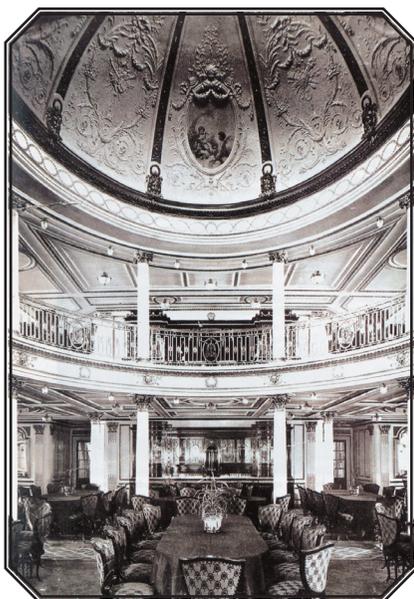
"Quite!" said the Captain. "Well you may wonder why a country with Europe's largest army and no colonies needs a navy."

The Ambassador answered deliberately and slowly. "We have not

required a navy heretofore because we have consistently been blocked in our efforts to obtain foreign possessions by the joint conspiracies of the French and the English.”

“And you don’t need one now. We’ll not be beaten at sea,” the Captain said. His tone attracted the attention of Alfred and some of the other diners. “For every ship Germany builds we will build two. Everyone knows the British government’s policy of building and maintaining a fleet equal to the next two largest navies combined.”

The Ambassador glanced at his wife, then the Captain, but chose to remain silent. The Captain regained his composure and the topic of shipbuilding was avoided for the duration of the meal.



Lusitania Saloon Class Dining Room, 1906



As the Captain escorted Wally into the passageway after dinner, he told her, “I fear there will be a heavy price to pay for all this shipbuilding. There is no reason for Germany to have the navy they are building. We have the resources to match them, but it is madness and folly.”

“And if the *Lusitania* were called into war, does she have guns?” Wally asked.

“Only placements for them. The bigger question is whether the navy would want her as she burns one thousand tons of coal a day.”

Wally excused herself when the Vanderbilt party appeared in the passageway. She greeted them eagerly despite her conviction Alfred was precisely the sort of man her sister Gladys would want her to avoid.

“How did you find the German Ambassador?” Alfred asked.

“He offered to make an introduction for me at school. Do you know him?”

“Friend of my brother,” Alfred answered in a tone that implied the man could therefore be no friend of his. Wally studied the handsome Alfred.

He looks dangerous somehow. I wonder how old he is? Ridiculous, don't even think about it.

Wally was painfully aware that her knowledge of men was limited to her dead father and her uninspiring brother-in-law. Vanderbilt, however, seemed a risky place to start her education.

Wally bade Alfred and his sisters farewell, then returned to her cabin to change before continuing to explore the ship. A crew member held the heavy door to permit Wally access to the Boat Deck. Her senses were immediately under assault and she was glad she had donned a coat. The vast darkness of the ocean with its salty wind contrasted with the brightly lit interiors behind. The crash of the waves mingled with the mechanical rumbling she felt through her feet as much as heard.

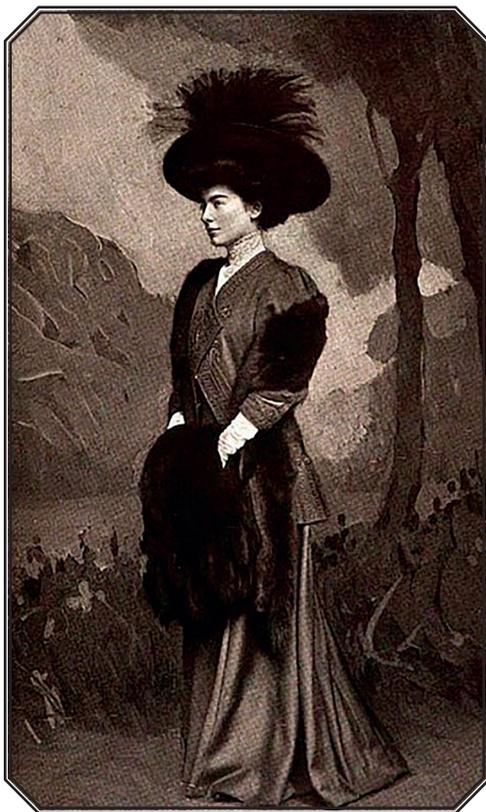
She grasped the railing with both hands and shivered as she absorbed the vastness of the Atlantic. Only the moon's reflection broke the shifting waves.

This is the sparkling path towards my new life.

She made her way down the Boat Deck towards the stern, passing a couple in tightly clutched coats. The deck was patterned by squares of light from the saloon room ports. Seen from the cold and wet deck, the bright interiors where passengers mingled in their finery seemed very far away.

Wally recognised the barrel vault and the oversized fireplace of the Music Room. She continued down the deck until she could peer into the men's smoking room. There they were, in their masculine preserve of Italian walnut, smoking cigars and probably discussing naval shipbuilding. She shook her head and walked on.

THE CROSSING



Countess Gladys Vanderbilt Széchenyi, 1908