

Elegance Before Tragedy  
By Madelyn Nichol

The large steam boat, or what Papa called a ship, was wading placidly in the water, ready to move as soon as everyone went aboard and revelled in the elegance of the amenities. Once I was checked for lice on one of the many small bridges leading to the "Unsinkable Ship", Papa and Madra led me up and we boarded the ship for the first time. I muttered a small Italian prayer and looked around at the people in Southampton, rushing and pushing to get on to the marvellous piece of something. I did not quite know what to expect, but Papa told me tales when he came home for the first time in months to gather me and Madre.

He was one of the many men who built the ship, and it took too long for me to like, even though Papa promised I would one day see the ship, and visit America for the first time. Madre and I stayed in Sicily while he was west, mending clothes for the people of the city. I had received many letters from Papa, telling me that the construction was sailing smoothly, and every day I got more and more excited.

I held Madre's hand and searched through my mind for the English I had learned from her. I learned some simple greetings and my birthdate, for anyone who needed to know. "Emilia," Madre pulled me forward and followed Papa to our second class cabin. We were a train of holding hands and bubbiness. The electric lights were bright in the creamy white halls, and my small boots ran over the brown rugs. My head was on an aching swivel, but I could not help but look around even as my neck became tired; there was too much to see, too many people with deep and the palest skin colours and suitcases among suitcases that were in my vision as we finally reached our small cabin.

There were two beds, and a small station with a washing basin and sink for cleaning teeth. A frown touched my face at the thought of cleaning my teeth with the rough toothbrush and strong mint toothpaste. Madre set hers and mine suitcase on the bottom bunk and began unpacking some clothes into one of the two drawers we had for clothes. I looked at Papa and pointed at the top bunk.

"I want to go up there!" I smiled and spoke in my mother tongue. Papa smiled, his shaven face and brown eyes just as bright as mine. I was a facsimile of him,

dark brown hair, tanned skin, and golden eyes. Madre was not as similar, with paler skin and blonde-green eyes. She had black hair, but it was not nearly as curly as mine.

Papa dipped his hands under my armpits and lifted me up onto the top bunk, and I squealed with delight. “Emilia,” Madre said in an irritated tone. I laughed and splayed over the slightly scratchy sheets.

“Calm down, Figlia,” Madre looked over her shoulder and smiled at the sight of me and Papa playing. “Let us enjoy this trip, Bruna,” Papa said. Madre sighed and went back to unpacking, this time Papa’s clothes. “I know, Antonio.”

I looked between the two of them and stuck my tongue out when they kissed. “Papa, I want to see everyone when we leave!” I jumped off the bunk and gripped his hand. “Per favore!” I pleaded. Papa looked down at me, I was not intimidated by his large stature.

“Are you ready to see New York?” He asked, putting his hands on his hips, a mischievous smile turning the corners of his mouth.

“Yes!” I exclaimed happily.

It was the fifteenth of April, 1912, when I discovered that I would no longer be living happily. I stayed in the cabin with Madre while Papa investigated the sound that we had just heard in the middle of the night. A sort of fear spread throughout my body, and hit me hard in the heart. Madre had been assuring me that nothing was wrong, but when Papa returned, his expression contradicted her words: He looked more stricken than he should have if it was just a sound.

“Vittoria, I need to talk to you in the hall. Emilia, you can go back to sleep.” Papa guided Madre out of the room as I pouted, still in the dark about the situation. While Madre and Papa talked in the hall, I pressed my ear against the door but heard nothing that made sense. They were talking in English. The only thing I heard was Madre gasp and start sobbing.

“Please stay strong, Vittoria, we need to make sure Emilia is safe.” Papa said the first sentence in Italian and I became suspicious. The door opened and Papa

picked me up immediately. “Emilia, put on your big coat, we are going to go on a ride in the lifeboats.” I thrashed in his grip, but relented to his demand.

“I don’t want to go on the lifeboats.” I looked around Papa and saw Madre also putting on her coat. I watched as Papa reached up above the basin and pulled out lifejackets. “Put this on, Emilia.” I pulled the white life preserve over my head and was assisted in tightening the straps.

“I don’t want to wear a life preserve!” I declared in the sternest voice an eight year old could muster. Papa pulled a life preserve over Madre then himself, “I want you to hold my hand, and no matter what, you may not let go.” I held his large hand and walked with my family out into the hall. We walked like how we boarded the ship. I ignored the clamouring passengers, running with the same lifejackets as me. Once we reached the main deck, the real horror came into view; People crowded desperately by the edge of the deck, screaming and shouting to get on a lifeboat. A sense of dread enveloped me like a warm hug, and gave me a cold feeling in my heart. I puffed out white breaths and held Papa’s hand like it was the last thing I would do.

We stepped into the large crowd, and I no longer was pouting, but wiping tears off my cheeks. Papa looked down at me every once in a while as we started getting closer to the lifeboats.

“Women and children first!” Someone with authority yelled over the fearful crowds. There was some groaning, but not from people who were irked, but the *Titanic* as it began tilting. I huddled **meekly** against Papa’s body and reached the railing, looking at the people jumping onto the lifeboat. I looked over my shoulder, and through the swarm of people, saw the end of the ship disappearing into the dark waters of the Atlantic. I wailed and hugged Papa, burying my face in his coat.

“The sink is sinking!” I couldn’t even get sentences that made sense out of my mouth because of the fear. Papa still held my hand and picked me up, hoisting me on his hip. “You are safe, Emilia, you are safe.” His words brought some reassurance in me, but I still welcomed the stabbing abysmal fear into my heart.

I still held Papa's hand. "Come onto the boat, child." Madre stepped forward into the swaying lifeboat and held her arms out for me. "Emilia, come here, Figlia." She was frantic, and I refused to leave Papa's arms.

"What about Papa?" I looked to him, searching for an answer. I received a friendly smile, and small words. "I'll see you in New York, Cielo," *Sky. My sky.*

He kissed me on my cheek and put me in Madre's arms. "Wait for me in New York!" he shouted over my crying and the screaming of the crowds.

"Papa!" I held his hand, and the lifeboat was lowered. I could not see with the blur of tears. "Papa!" I wailed. The ship began to tilt more and more, and I had to tip my head to see him straight. I didn't have to see his knuckles to know they were white as one hand gripped the railing.

Our hands finally separated, and just how they broke apart, my heart tore into two. "Papa, no!" my voice was a high shrill.

"Addio, cielo mio, ci vediamo presto!" Papa called out. We hit the water, and started to row away from the ship. I clamoured in the small boat, and gripped the edge, howling to Papa who still stared at me from above. I swore I felt a small and ice-like tear fall on my face, but it was only a splash of water coming up from below.

Shock and even more fear surged through me as the ice made me frozen, and through my heated sorrow, I felt the itching cold and floe feeling wash over me. I couldn't move, but found the small strength to curl into Madre and a translucent blanket that was thrown over me, failing to hide my fear.

We floated out more and more until I saw the whole ship, hugging Madre and staring at the one spot where I had to leave Papa. I could no longer see it after the ship went up like a fork in food, then broke in half like a sweet cracker. I couldn't look anymore, I couldn't look at the stars, the reflective ocean, nor the ship that disappeared from sight of anyone. I would not look at a graveyard of people floating.

I didn't think about Papa floating among them, maybe alive, but not for long. My eyes had cried all the tears in a lifetime, and the sorrow seemed almost welcoming. I slept for as long as I could remember, shivering but not complaining

about the cold; I knew there were people in the glacier water hoping desperately to be saved.

The *Carpathia* came in the same night, and soon after boarding it, I came off of the ship with Madre in America. The Land of Opportunity. New York was a spectacle, but it did not seem as bright as I imagined it would when I dreamed about it with Papa. He was not there to meet us, I realized that soon enough. I would never have him, never have him bless a man to marry me, nor walk me down the aisle of marriage and betrothal. I would have to live without him. I did not want to, but I had to.