

LETTERS FROM THE TITANIC

A Play By:
David Abbinanti

SAMPLE SCRIPT

the
Licensing
HOUSE

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Letters from the Titanic. A Play by David Abbinanti

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ABOUT the SHOW

When Denise D'Onofrio, a New York City working mom and part-time real estate agent, stumbles upon a collection of water-damaged letters hidden in an apartment building's storage loft, she assumes they're worthless. But as she and her husband Richie investigate, they uncover something extraordinary: lost messages from passengers aboard the Titanic. As experts confirm the letters' authenticity, Denise is torn between the financial freedom they could bring her struggling family and the moral weight of returning these artifacts to the descendants of those who wrote them.

Letters from the Titanic is a poignant, character-driven dramedy that blends contemporary humor with historical depth. Told through Denise's emotional journey, the play explores the legacy we leave behind, the unexpected ways the past can shape the present, and the choices we face between doing what's easy and doing what's right. Rich with humanity, historical echoes, and heartfelt storytelling, this is a play about everyday people asked to do something extraordinary—put morality ahead of money—with nothing but their conscience to guide them.

CHARACTERS

15 Characters + Optional Ensemble

9F, 6M

Denise D’Onofrio (Female, 30s–40s)

A hardworking real estate agent and mother of two. Intelligent, empathetic, and caught between financial struggle and moral conviction.

Richie D’Onofrio (Male, 30s–40s)

Denise’s husband. Easygoing and humorous, he’s more pragmatic than principled at first, but his heart is always in the right place.

Gina (Female, 30s–40s)

Denise’s sister. A sharp, principled assistant professor of literature at NYU. Level-headed and protective.

Donna Hartsfield (Female, 40s–50s)

A confident, status-obsessed university administrator. Ambitious, manipulative, and doesn’t like being outsmarted.

Lisa Simms (Female, 30s–40s)

Donna’s assistant. Eager, a bit naïve, and complicit in Donna’s schemes, though not necessarily malicious.

Dr. Samantha Alton (Female, 50s–70s)

An accomplished historical appraiser. Brilliant, dryly funny, and no-nonsense, with a love for her field and a quick wit.

Dr. Michelle Breckenridge (Female, 60s)

The leading Titanic historian in the U.S. Warm, composed, deeply knowledgeable, and personally connected to the letters.

Jamie Macnamara (Female, 60s)

Esther Hart’s great-granddaughter. Kind, dignified, and full of emotional depth. Carries the weight of her family’s legacy.

Historical Characters (Flashback Scenes)

William (Male, 60s)

A veteran crewman aboard the C.S. Mackay-Bennett, the ship that recovered Titanic victims. Gruff but deeply affected by what he sees.

Jacob (Male, 20s)

A younger crewman on the Mackay-Bennett. Sensitive and shaken by the realities of his job.

Ramón (Male, 30s–40s)

A South American Titanic passenger who survived another shipwreck years earlier. His story is shared posthumously in a reflective sequence.

Jennifer (Female, 18)

NYU student in Gina’s class

Waitress (Female, any age)

Brief scene serving Denise and Jamie in a NYC café.

Titanic Telegraph Operator (Male, 20s–30s)

Appears in a short reenactment scene, overwhelmed with messages on the night of the sinking.

Californian Telegraph Operator (Male, 20s–40s)

Appears briefly sending iceberg warnings, dismissed by Titanic’s operator.

SCENE 1

D'ONOFRIO APARTMENT—KITCHEN

(DENISE D'ONOFRIO, 30, dressed in a business suit scrambles around the kitchen trying to cook and prepare multiple meals. Her husband, RICHIE D'ONOFRIO, sits at the table going through bills.)

RICHIE

You sure this one wasn't paid?

DENISE

Yes, I'm sure. Which one?

(she looks over his shoulder)

Yup.

(yelling offstage)

Anng (short for Angelina)—you want cheese on your chicken nuggets?

(she listens for an answer)

On the side? Ok. Cat (short for Caterina)—you?

(listening again)

(now to herself)

One on the chicken, one on the side. One ketchup, one Thousand Island but not the fancy one. Ok..ok...

RICHIE

This one says it's three months past due.

(looking at it more closely)

Holy crap! All the interest accrues?!

DENISE

Well, it was either pay the Kohls' bill or the internet. The girls needed new winter coats and we need to be online to you know...work. Figured the chances of them cutting our internet was more likely than a Kohls employee coming over and stealing coats from our children.

RICHIE

(still looking at the bills)
No, good call. I'm not disagreeing with...with um...

DENISE

With me?

RICHIE

Sure. What are we having for dinner?

DENISE

(sarcastically)
Oh, would you like to hear the specials?

(DENISE goes to the cabinet)

RICHIE

Yes, please.

DENISE

Tonight we're featuring two very special soups de jour.

(she turns to RICHIE holding up two Campbell's soup cans)

DENISE

Are you ready to order?

RICHIE

(as if ordering from a fancy restaurant menu)
Hmmm. Yes. The lady will have the Minestrone.

DENISE

And for the gentleman?

RICHIE

The Chicken and Stars sounds delightful. Is it farm to table?

DENISE

But of course. Farm "aisle seven."

(They share a small smile. Times are hard financially, but they are doing their best to get through it together and with humor. DENISE gets a text.)

Of course.

RICHIE

Of course, what?

DENISE

Of course, the client I told you about who couldn't see the 83rd street loft today can see it in half an hour.

RICHIE

Go. I got this.

DENISE

Really?

RICHIE

Of course. We could use the commission. I'll finish dinner.

(DENISE replies to the text)

DENISE

Ok, babe. I'll be like an hour. Hour and a half maybe.

RICHIE

It's fine. Good luck. Ze minestrone 'vil be ready when me lady returns.

(DENISE exits. RICHIE tends to the cooking.)

(to himself)

Not sure what accent that was.

SCENE 2

NEW YORK CITY LOFT

(Lights up on SAMUEL and RITA—an uptight, very wealthy young couple standing in a loft, looking around, examining every detail of the space closely. The place is an empty loft, except for some ratty-looking plastic bags in the corner. RITA goes to look out the window.)

RITA

It's not as nice as Park Slope but at least it's closer to work.

SAMUEL

Actually, it's not. This may be Manhattan but Park Slope is still closer to my office.

RITA

Yes, true. But it's better to be here. And we can do a lot with this space.

SAMUEL

(looking up and examining the wall)

E could put some nice mold in here.

RITA

(looking up)

Molding, babe. Crown molding.

SAMUEL

What did I say?

RITA

Not that.

DENISE

(entering)

Hi guys. Thank you for waiting. I rushed right over here. You guys know how it is...kids' homework, then dinner...all the craziness.

RITA

(in all sincerity but not mockingly—trying to relate)

Yes, we do. Our au pair has been pulling crazy hours the past week.

SAMUEL

What year is the building? Pre-war, I'm guessing.

DENISE

(attempting a joke)

1911. So "pre-both-wars."

(What a bad joke. DENISE composes herself—they NEED this commission!)

So, it's thirty-two hundred square feet. Umm, 24/7 doorman, a state-of-the-art gym with an indoor lap pool, movie room, free dog-walking service, resident's lounge—

SAMUEL

I'm allergic.

DENISE

To other residents?

(oof...another bad joke)

DENISE (CONT'D)

(off SAMUEL's eyeroll)

I'll make sure any pets are on a separate floor.

SAMUEL

(re: the plastic bags)

What's with the trash?

DENISE

Oh yeah. The cleaners must have moved them in here. Such an old building, you can't imagine all the junk that accumulates. This is the last of it, I believe.

(she smiles)

SAMUEL

I'd love to have my contractor get started on measurements. Please make sure that trash is gone.

DENISE

Move—uhh—yes, of course. This week.

RITA

By tomorrow, please.

DENISE

Tomorrow...of course.

SAMUEL

(taking RITA's hand)

Okay. Done. Work out the details with Gretchen. Thank you.

RITA

Thanks, Deborah.

(they exit)

DENISE

It's Den—

(to herself)

Oh, whatever. Well, that was the easiest comission I ever made.

(She sees the bags and stops herself. She sighs and begins to pick them up.)

(exiting)

Denise D'Onofrio...realtor extraordinaire...professional moving service!

SCENE 3

INT. D'ONOFRIO HOME

(Lights up on RICHIE fixing two cups of coffee. He's calling to DENISE who is offstage.)

RICHIE

I knew you were good but I didn't think you were that good!

DENISE (O.S)

I knew I had them when they saw the view of the park.

RICHIE

Why do people go so crazy for views of parks? I never understood it. It's like, you pay all this extra money just to watch strangers jog and have picnics. Is that really worth it?

DENISE

(entering in her comfy clothes)

To some people, yeah. And realtors LOVE those people.

RICHIE

So, tell me again. What's your cut?

DENISE

(sitting at the table and looking at papers)

Well, the sale was 2.5, 5% of that is a hundred twenty five thousand, half to the selling agent, then 30% brokerage, should be like 43k. Around there.

RICHIE

43k for an hour of work. Not bad

DENISE

Yeah, ok. Hardly. This was the fifteenth place I showed them. And don't forget taxes.

RICHIE

(doing some quick math)

So more like 25.

DENISE

Probably.

RICHIE

Unreal. 2.5 million and the one who does all the work making it happen gets—

(he doesn't want to upset her)

You did good, babe. Really.

(DENISE smiles)

DENISE

So we can finally pay back your dad and...hmmm...either pay off one visa or send a little to all of them.

RICHIE

How long until we get our heads above water, here?

DENISE

I'd dust off your SCUBA gear.

(they share smile)

RICHIE

Ok, well. I'll do that while you drag those dusty bags down to the trash room.

DENISE

How about you take those bags down. I was the brought home the bacon today.

RICHIE

Fair enough.

(DENISE puts her feet up. RICHIE exits to get the dusty bags DENISE brought back from the apartment.)

DENISE

(calling after him)

So, hey. Maybe this will be our new thing. I make the money and when I get home, you'll have dinner ready, you know. You can make sure you're all made up. Wearing something cute. You know, like I have a housewife in the fifties.

(RICHIE enters with the bags)

RICHIE

Fat chance. But I'll let you have this one. And yes, I'll even be the garbage man for you today, ma'am.

DENISE

(smiling)

You make a cute garbage man. What's even in those things?

RICHIE

Well, let's see now.

(looking in the bag)

I don't know. Just a bunch of envelopes and paper. This is pretty nasty, actually.

DENISE

Just throw it away. I'm going to bed.

RICHIE

No wait.

(RICHIE pulls out an oilskin pouch, corroded and brown)

This is insanely gross. But I'm kind of intrigued. In a gross way.

DENISE

(lovingly joking)

That's because you're gross.

RICHIE

Seriously. There's some kind of like, official-looking seal on this thing.

(squinting to try and read)

R...N..five...no...S. R...N...S?

DENISE

(getting up)

R N S? What's R N S?

(looking closer)

R...M...R M S.

(beat)

R M S?

RICHIE

(still reading)

Titanic. RMS Titanic?

DENISE

Titanic? No. Let me see that.

RICHIE

Was the RMS Titanic the Titanic? Like the sunk one?

DENISE

How many Titanics do you know?

RICHIE

Okay but the RMS threw me. What does that even mean?

DENISE

I don't know but I know there was only one boat. What else is in there?

(RICHIE reaches into the plastic bag and pulls out a letter. He opens it. Out of their view—

—lights up on JEREMIAH BURKE-19-year old Irish lad with an accent, dressed in 1912, third-class "Titanic" clothing speaking to the back of the house)

JEREMIAH

From Titanic. Goodbye, all. Burke of Glanmire, Cork.

(lights down on JEREMIAH)

RICHIE

(looking at the letter)

What the..?

DENISE

Goodbye all, from the Titanic? Let me see that.

(DENISE grabs the letter and looks at it)

That makes no sense. How could...? What else is in there?

(They look together. The other bags have nothing but trash and there's nothing left in the first bag.)

RICHIE

Nothing else, really.

(they look at the oilskin pouch)

DENISE

What about that? In there?

RICHIE

I'm afraid to look.

(They slowly and carefully open the pouch. DENISE carefully removes a letter and takes it out of an envelope. Again—

—lights up on ELLEN ANDREWS—a young, middle-class Englishwoman speaking to the back of the house)

ELLEN

Dearest mother.

It's not that I don't want to go.

It should be understood beyond any doubt that nothing fills my heart with joy more than to attend my beloved brother's wedding in America.

The excitement and anticipation that has been building inside of me since news of their engagement was wired to us has been noticeably hard to contain. As you well know.

No one knows better than you how delighted I am to be at such a glorious occasion and the only event that could bring more happiness to the moment would be that good health finds you able to attend yourself. It should be fiercely understood that any apprehension I have shown had nothing to do with Henry, nor my willingness to represent our family at such a joyous celebration.

(her mood gets a little more serious)

But why this ship?

You know my fears and my hesitation regarding it.

I have made no secret.

Even if I had, my sleepless nights over the past two weeks should have given you at least some cause to reconsider.

Yes, I know, mother. It is the fastest.

The safest.

The unsinkable.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

I wish there were a better way for me to communicate to you, that the very words which provide you with comfort are the same that give me pause.

Dread really.

You know how I feel about tempting fate.

How I feel about those who swat their hand at the almighty like they're shooing away a fly. That's the very reason I wanted to wait. To take a later crossing. One that perhaps would time out with your recovery.

But alas. You insist and I must concede. No matter my reservations, hesitations or fears. I'm sure it will all be fine, dear mum. And I cannot wait to be there for Henry.

Your adoring and dutiful daughter—Ellen.

(RICHELIE and DENISE open another letter. Light up on RAMÓN ARTAGAVEYTIA—a 71-year-old Uruguayan businessman and first-class passenger aboard the Titanic.)

RAMÓN

My Dear brother Enrique,

It had been 41 years since the last time I boarded a vessel.
Any vessel.

Yet, there I was. Decades since I leaped into the water in a desperate attempt to save my life from that fire aboard the America. I was a much younger man then, as you know, my dear brother.

I was boarding a ship again. Embarking on the mighty Atlantic Ocean this time and heading for Europe.

I'd be lying if I said I was calmer as an older man. Apparently, nerves and panic attacks defy age.

Each creak of the stern, each wave that rocked us...would find me standing up and reaching for my lifebelt. I could hear voices yelling,

"Fire! Fire! Fire!

Too many times would I race up onto the deck to find nothing but a peaceful, starry evening. No one was yelling. No one was panicking. Where were those voices coming from?

The first night I actually had a full night's sleep was my first night in a bed. In a hotel. In Europe.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

But my voyage back...that will be something different, altogether. The technological wonder that is the R.M.S. Titanic swaddles me like a warm blanket. I know I need not worry.

You can't imagine, Enrique, the security the telegraph gives. When the America sank, right in front of Montevideo, nobody answered to the lights asking for help. The ones that saw us from the ship Villa del Salto, did not answer. Now, with a telephone on board, that won't happen again. We can communicate instantly with the whole world.

I feel safe. I look forward to this journey back to the United States and seeing you once again, brother.

With love...Ramón

(Lights out on RAMÓN)

RICHIE

Sooooo....what are we actually reading here?

DENISE

I don't...these can't be real.

(beat)

Can they?

RICHIE

They're garbage. They gotta be. It's probably some dude who wrote them for some project. Or like a play or something dumb like that.

DENISE

(skeptical)

Yeah, maybe.

RICHIE

(noticing DENISE's interest in them)

Oh, come on. Yeah, All those people died on that ship but somehow, miraculously these letters swam to safety?

DENISE

I don't know. I mean...what's with the pouch? With the seal?

RICHIE

D, look—the building you took these from is three blocks from Broadway. They gotta be props or something. The prop...propateer for some show probably lived there.

DENISE

It's a prop master and no prop master could afford to live in that place. Maybe if I found it in some studio in Astoria, you'd have a point.

RICHIE

I do have a point. And the point is, they're fake. Plain and simple.

(yawning and exiting)

Come on. Day's over. I'll throw these out tomorrow with the rest of the garbage.

DENISE

Yeah. I'm coming.

(DENISE gets up and heads to the door, not before stopping and looking back at the letters. Lights out.)

SCENE 4

1912-DECK OF THE RMS TITANIC

(Lights up. Second class passenger, ESTHER HART looks over the rail at the vast Atlantic Ocean. She yawns as her husband, BENJAMIN enters.)

BENJAMIN

Esther, I didn't expect to find you awake, my dear.

ESTHER

It's only noon, my love. I'll go in soon enough.

(beat)

How's Eva?

BENJAMIN

Napping peacefully. Like an angel.

ESTHER

Bless her heart. The innocence and inner peace of a child.

(beat as they both look out)

BENJAMIN

Penny for your thoughts?

ESTHER

(sweetly, not insulting)

My dear husband, if we had pennies to spare on such frivolous things, we wouldn't be leaving England.

(sadder)

And Mother.

BENJAMIN

Now, darling. I can't control your mother's decisions. She didn't want to join us. You know that nothing in the world would have pleased me more than to have my dear mother-in-law alongside of us. Every step of journey. Together.

ESTHER

You're a terrible liar.

BENJAMIN

Well, yes. I know that. But there's something else I know. You can't keep staying up every night, worrying about all the things that can go wrong. Will a fire break out, will we topple under a rogue wave...we're on the grandest ship man has ever constructed and every scenario has already been thought through by people a lot smarter than us. They have taken every precaution necessary to keep us, Eva and everyone on board as safe and as comfortable as we could ever imagine.

ESTHER

Your logic makes all the sense in the world, Benny. I just wish it worked on me.

BENJAMIN

And what do you suppose you would do, love, should something happen during the night? How does staying up each and every night help us from avoiding the types of disasters you drum up in your head?

ESTHER

It's not that I don't want to sleep. I can't. Don't you see? I can't even bring my eyes to close. I tried that first night. But each time there was a bump, or a shake, or a noise, they shot open like they had been pulled by a puppeteer! Beyond my control.

(beat)

I'll just be glad when this whole thing is over.

BENJAMIN

Had I known you would spend all your days either on the deck or napping with Eva and all your nights pacing the ship worrying, I would have bought us steerage tickets.

(they share a small laugh)

ESTHER

No, no. You've been wonderful. Such a beautiful experience you're making sure we have. Don't let my fears and insecurities overshadow what you've done for Eva and me. You are a wonderful man, Benjamin. I'm lucky to love you.

BENJAMIN

Thank you, my dear. And I think you're going to learn to love Toronto.

(she sighs)

ESTHER

I'm going to go write mother.

(she kisses his cheek and begins to exit)

BENJAMIN

Tell her I said, "hi."

(ESTHER smiles and exits)

SCENE 5

D'ONOFIRO APARTMENT—THE NEXT MORNING

(The sound of music come through DENISE's iPad and she sits at the table watching what obviously sounds like the end of the 1997 film, TITANIC. DENISE has a tissue and is teary. RICHIE enters and sees this. DENISE doesn't notice RICHIE but the film is over and she turns the iPad off.)

DENISE

(to herself)

There was plenty of room on that door for both of them.

(she wipes her eyes and then notices RICHIE)

(gathering herself)

Oh...hey. You're up early.

RICHIE

Tell me you weren't just crying at the end of Titanic.

DENISE

(covering)

Me? No...what? I was watching that dog video. With the guy coming home from Iraq.

(he looks at her suspiciously)

RICHIE

There was no room for him. They both would have died.

DENISE

Are you crazy!? The door—

(She stops herself and they both chuckle. RICHIE pours himself a cup of coffee.)

RICHIE

So, what are you watching that for anyway?

(re: the letters)

This stuff spark your interest again?

DENISE

I don't know. Maybe.

RICHIE

Was there a Ramón? Or an Ellen? Or a...what was the dude's name again?

DENISE

Jeremiah?

RICHIE

Yeah, Jeremiah. Any of them in the film?

DENISE

No.

RICHIE

See?

DENISE

See what?

RICHIE

I mean, James Cameron is a psycho with detail.

DENISE

No, they're not in the film. But they're real people.

RICHIE

Oh boy, you've been googling.

DENISE

Yeah, I've been googling. And all these people existed. They were actual passengers.

RICHIE

Ok sure. They probably were. But babe, there's no way these are actual letters from the actual boat.

DENISE

Ship.

RICHIE

(being silly in a high voice)
Oh no. Help me help me!

(in a low voice)
Jump in ma'am.

(high voice)
No. Forget about my life. Save these letters!

(he laughs)

DENISE

(smiling and rolling her eyes)
You're an idiot.

RICHIE

What?? It's true. I mean, it's absurd to think that...don't ya think?

DENISE

Yeah, I think. But...

RICHIE

But what?

DENISE

I don't know. I mean...what if they are real. Like "for real" real? Don't you think it's worth looking into? Rather than just tossing them?

RICHIE

I don't// think that the

DENISE

//I mean, maybe they're even worth something. Maybe I was meant to find them.

RICHIE

So, what then? We go to some archaeologist or something?

DENISE

(going back to her iPad)
I don't know. There's gotta be like experts on the Titanic.

RICHIE

Okay. I'll call James Cameron.

(TRANSITION: Different Titanic passengers appear. Use your creativity here. Maybe a couple walks by as if looking out on the Atlantic and points at the view. Kids mimic playing shuffleboard or spinning a top. Use this as a transition to change the set to—)

SCENE 6

NYU CLASSROOM

(MS. GINA CALABRESE—Denise's sister, a music appreciation professor is lecturing to her class. These are not music majors, it is their liberal arts requirement, and all are bored to tears except JAMIE who knows everything.)

GINA

And that's how major keys relate to their relative minor. Mozart and Beethoven did it all the time. Questions?

(Nope!)

The easy way to think of it is that major keys usually sound happy and minor keys usually sound sad.

JAMIE

(raising her hand)

That's not exactly true. Mozart's Symphony number 40, Habanera from Carmen, anything Rossini wrote...all minor...all happy.

GINA

Sure. There are exceptions—

JAMIE

Shut up and Dance, Blinding Lights...

GINA

Uh huh.

JAMIE

The Titanic song. Major, but sad.

GINA

Ahh...but the chorus goes to guess what...the relative minor! And that's why everyone cries at the end. Thank you for proving my point, Jamie.

(GINA looks at her watch)

GINA (CONT'D)

Alright. See you all Wednesday when we discuss Brahms. Romantic genius or Beethoven without the charm. See you then.

(they all leave as DENISE enters)

DENISE

Hey, sis.

GINA

D.D. What brings you downtown?

DENISE

Oh, I was showing a Soho loft to two "BFFs" from Arizona. Thought you'd maybe wanna grab lunch or something.

GINA

Oh, cool. How'd it go?

DENISE

Well, they want to live like Monica and Rachel on a Joey and Phoebe budget. They'll end up in Long Island City.

GINA

I don't envy you.

DENISE

Yeah. So, how's it going here?

GINA

Oh, you know. Trying to get kids excited about Mozart. It's why I studied music.

DENISE

(beat)

So, hey...listen. What like...this is so dumb...What do you know about the Titanic?

GINA

The Titanic?

DENISE

Yeah.

GINA

Well, I know the song uses the relative minor in the chorus.

DENISE

No. Duh. I mean like the actual ship.

GINA

I dunno. I guess what everyone else knows from the movie. Why?

DENISE

Nothing. It's just this thing I found the other day at another apartment I was showing. It's like this old, ratty satchel with Titanic lettering on it and there's these old looking letters in it.

(GINA looks at her like she's weird)

(off her look)

I know, I know. Richie thinks they're from a Broadway play or something. Like the prop master took them home.

GINA

Sounds about right. There was just a revival of the musical last year. Lasted almost as long as the actual ship.

DENISE

Yeah, I guess. But like...I've been googling a lot of stuff about it and they say that some letters did survive. Like for real.

GINA

Really? Huh. Well, what do you think?

DENISE

I'm not sure. I think it's possible but I feel stupid telling anyone.

GINA

Tell you what. I have one more class. Go home and get them. Meet me back here at two and we'll go over to the Arts and Sciences building and show them to my friend, Donna. She teaches about all this archaeology and antiquities stuff. At the very least, she might be able to confirm they're fake and you can get back to worrying regular stuff. Like normal.

DENISE

Yeah...you think?

GINA

Yeah, I think. See you in a bit.

SCENE 7

1912—ESTHER HART'S STATEROOM—RMS TITANIC

(ESTHER checks on her sleeping daughter, EVA. Then walks over to the desk. Takes out paper and begins writing. As she writes, an O.S. voice reads in an Irish accent as if we are hearing her thoughts as she writes.)

O.S. "ESTHER"

Sunday afternoon, April fourteenth, nineteen hundred and twelve

My Dear Mother,

As you see it is Sunday afternoon and we are resting after luncheon. We miss you very much. The ship is wonderful and there is hardly any motion.

They say we are going into ice, but there is not the slightest danger.

(she thinks for a moment, smiles, then continues writing)

We had a delightful concert last night. The food is very good and the people very nice. Eva has been very good as well. As good as any seven-year old can be. She has had no seasickness. I was rather bad for two days but am alright now. We are longing to get to New York and hop the train to Toronto. I hope you are quite well.

With fondest love from us both...Your loving daughter, Esther.

(ESTHER puts the pen down and folds the letter. Then remembers something, unfolds the letter again and writes—)

P.S. Benjamin says hi.

(She refolds the letter into an envelope. She looks around for something and spots her husband, BENJAMIN's sports coat. She places the letter in the inside pocket.)

SCENE 8

PROFESSOR DONNA HARTSFIELD'S NYU OFFICE

(DENISE, GINA and DONNA are there. DONNA carefully examines the letters with a magnifying glass. They're all wearing protective gloves.)

DONNA

Well...hmmm.

(they both look at DONNA and at the letters, then back at DONNA)

GINA

"Well hmmm, it's possible" or "well hmmm, you're both idiots?"

DONNA

"Hard to tell well hmm."

DENISE

Hmm.

DONNA

I mean, the chances of these being real and from the Titanic is pretty much slim to none.

DENISE

I'm hearing a "but."

DONNA

But...even if they were, they more than likely have little to no value.

GINA

Seriously?

DENISE

I know there were letters. I read stuff online about people explaining the meals, the rooms. Everything. How could they explain such detail if letters like this didn't survive.

DONNA

Well, R.M.S. stands for "Royal Mail Steamer." Titanic delivered mail. That was it's job. And it made two stops after leaving Southampton—Cherbourg and Queenstown. Many passengers wrote letters on that part of the trip and mailed letters from those two stops. Before the famous iceberg. It's hardly news that a mail ship mailed letters.

DENISE

Yeah, okay. But what about Jeremiah and that, “Goodbye, all?”

DONNA

You’re reading too much into it. It’s not as haunting as it sounds. That kid was most likely a third-class passenger. Lots of them used to write two, three-word letter back home just to let their mothers know they were okay. If it were real, and again, I’m telling you I doubt they are, it was him saying goodbye from one of those towns. Not from a door floating in the Atlantic.

GINA

Well, that unfortunately adds up.

DONNA

Sorry, Denise. If you were looking for a big payday, I’m afraid you have to keep working. There’s, just too many inconsistencies.

DENISE

Then how’d they end up together? In a bag in NYC?

(DONNA shrugs)

DONNA

Your husband is probably right. Props for a show or something. Some kid’s history project. They’re fun to look at though. Mind if I take pics of them?

(DONNA holds up her phone)

My husband is a huge Titanic nerd.

DENISE

Sure. Just no flash.

DONNA

(is this girl kidding)

Seriously?

(DONNA snaps pics of a few of the letters)

DENISE

(to GINA)

Just in case.

DONNA

Thanks guys. He'll get a kick out of this.

GINA

(to DENISE)

Come on. Let's grab lunch. I'm buying.

(DENISE and GINA exit. DONNA gives them a wave, then exits.)

SCENE 9

D'ONOFRIO APARTMENT—KITCHEN

(RICHIE and his buddy, GREG enter just having gone for a run. RICHIE grabs two bottles of water and hands one to GREG.)

RICHIE

You watching the Knicks tonight?

GREG

Yeah, I wish. It's dance recital season. Three full hours of watching a bunch of strangers' kids just to see Riley dance for 30 seconds.

RICHIE

Cry me a river, bro. Denise warned you and Kim not to get her involved in ballet. We went AWOL last year. The girls hated it and we got our lives back. So, it's game six for me tonight.

GREG

Yeah well, thanks for the sympathy.

(noticing the plastic bags)

What's with the bags?

RICHIE

Oh...oh yeah, maid's been on strike.

(they laugh)

Actually, it's stupid. D had to drag them home from an apartment she sold.

GREG

What's in it.

RICHIE

You really wanna know?

GREG

Yeah.

RICHIE

I told you it's stupid.

(RICHIE goes to the bags)

It's these old-looking letters with writing on them like they're from the Titanic.

(GREG looks at some of them)

Denise took the good ones. The ones you can read at least. One of Gina's friends at NYU who was going to evaluate them. See if they were worth anything and then maybe we could pay rent next month.

GREG

Cool.

RICHIE

Yeah. I'm pretty sure they're worthless, but Denise, you know.

GREG

You should show these to Kim. She'd freak.

RICHIE

Why?

GREG

You kidding? She knows everything about the Titanic. She's obsessed. She watches every documentary on it, knows the movie by heart. And not just the DiCaprio one, the one from the fifties too with the horrible acting and annoying siren. She even dragged me to that thing in Chelsea to look at hundreds of scraps of wood. Truly fascinating stuff. Heck, Kim would probably buy these from you and wallpaper our house with it.

RICHIE

Sold! Take 'em.

(They laugh. GREG gets up to head out.)

GREG

Nah, man. I don't want 'em. But hang onto them so Kim can see them when we hang out Saturday. She'll geek out for sure.

(GREG exits. RICHIE sits for a moment. Picks up one of the letters and starts to read. Lights up on—)

1912-THIRD-CLASS PASSANGER ROOM—RMS TITANIC

(It's nighttime. Four young women are in four bunk beds. They can be doing whatever—reading, writing, sleeping. Focus on KATHLEEN DILLON, 20 and begins writing a letter. As she writes, an O.S. voice reads in an Irish accent as if we are hearing her thoughts as she writes.)

O.S. "KATHLEEN"

April 14.

My dearest brother, Daniel. Just a few words before I turn in for the night. The trip has been glorious so far. Nary a bump or a shift to be felt. However, four days at sea has already made me homesick for Kinsale...

For you.
And mother.
And the baby.

(she thinks for a moment, then writes)

I see all the rich and wealthy people walk by. They don't speak to us. But their eyes say all they need to say. Remember what Grandma Dillon used to call them? 'Pity eyes?'

(she smiles)

Those eyes she used to say the Barristers and professors used to look down at Grandpa Dillon.

As he trudged home from the mill through the city streets.

Dressed in the same clothes, covered in the same dirt.

'Pity eyes' she called them.

As if working for fifteen hours six days a week to provide were of little to no value.

It's those same eyes, Dan.

(she thinks for a moment, then writes)

And here I am. Given an opportunity to become one of them.

Which I pray will never happen.

O.S. "KATHLEEN"(CONT'D)

Oh, I'm delighted at the prospect of an education. Why would I be here if I weren't?

I know very little about Smith but I am excited.

Excited to learn, to think and to make a difference.

You know what they say about Smith girls—

They—

(She stops, shakes her head and crosses that out. Then writes—)

WE don't just sit pretty
We speak up!

And you know that's who I want to be.
Kathleen Dillon—scholar.

But I don't want to be one of them.

For what good is an education or success if it only trains you to look down on people like us.

Like you.
Like Grandpa.

You hear many rumblings about how terrible our accommodations are and yet...I find them perfectly comfortable. My bunkmates are nothing but friendly and cheerful. The meals are some of the finest and most filling I've ever had. By the time my stomach adjusts to being full from breakfast, they're ringing the lunch bell.

Dinner tonight was exceptional. Roast beef, homemade biscuits, corn, potatoes, soup. Even pudding.

One of my new friends even took seconds.
"Manners be damned" she whispered.
None of us turned her in.

Well Daniel. It's getting late and I am to turn in now.
I just wanted to relay some thoughts to you.
For you.
And for me.
As it is now making me sleepy.

I am forever indebted to you and mother for the sacrifices you made to allow me to travel in such a fashion.

O.S. "KATHLEEN" CONT'D)

And to embark on such an exciting adventure. That will continue long after I have disembarked in New York.

(The lights flicker a few times. The other girls look or wake up. Not panicked but curious.)

GIRL 1

What was that?

(the others shrug)

O.S. "KATHLEEN"

(writing)

It seems we're having a little power trouble. So, before the lights go out fully, I'll take this as an opportunity to say goodnight.

(lights completely out)

Your loving sister,
Kathleen

SCENE 10

NYC CAFÉ

(DENISE and GINA are having lunch)

GINA

I know it's not the news you wanted to hear but hey, I'd hang on to them. They can still be a good conversation piece at parties.

DENISE

Yeah, I know. Most of me thought it was nothing. But there's that little part of you ya know...that part that makes you think, oh maybe this is like the movies and this will save us. Pay off some debt, maybe even take a weekend to go away or something. I mean, forget the real estate biz. I busted my butt to make a multi-million dollar sale and what did it get us? Barely enough to pay off money we owed to Frank. I want to do something, Gina. You know how I always talked about joining the Peace Corps or Greenpeace. Something that makes a difference in people's lives. Something way more important than setting up ivy league stockbroker bros in four-bedroom lofts. I mean, what kind of impact is that making on the world? It's like...what am I doing with my life?

(beat)

GINA

Well...you're a wife and a mom to two great girls.

(DENISE laughs)

DENISE

Yeah. But besides that.

GINA

Look. This is very common. I've seen it before.

DENISE

What?

GINA

Everyone thinks that only men go through a mid-life crisis but it's not true. Women do too. At some point, women panic that they haven't accomplished what they set out for. As their kids are no longer babies, if they're unhappy in their career, we all start thinking, "what's next?" "What can I do to change things?" You wanna make a difference in people's lives outside of your family. I get it. Totally normal. And it's a special trait to have.

(beat)

DENISE

Who you callin' mid-life?

GINA

Quarter-life crisis then. Call it what you want but everyone goes through one. Women especially but no one talks about it. Men? They just buy a corvette and they're over it.

DENISE

Yeah. I thought if there was any money in this it would just help me do that. That's all.

GINA

Or at least enough for Rich to buy a used Kia Sorrento when his hits.

(They laugh and go back to their lunch. Lights fade.)

SCENE 11

PROFESSOR DONNA HARTSFIELD'S NYU OFFICE

(Lights up on DONNA and her colleague, DR. LISA SIMMS, they're looking at the pictures DONNA took of the letters with great curiosity.)

LISA

Unreal. So, what did you say to her?

DONNA

What do you think I said?

LISA

Donna, this could be worth a fortune.

DONNA

No Sherlock, Sherlock.

LISA

And she has no clue.

DONNA

None. She's not bright enough to know any of this.

LISA

And her sister.

DONNA

She's a musician.

LISA

(looking even more closely and half acknowledging DONNA)
Right, right. They're pretty dumb.

(beat as DONNA looks at LISA)

DONNA

And the way I look at it, it's not my fault if they haven't done their due diligence and don't know what they could be sitting on.

(beat)

DONNA (CONT'D)

So, I scanned them for some of the obvious things, but what do you look for precisely to figure out if they're legit?

LISA

Well, there's a few clues that even the some of the foremost experts on Titanic would miss. Luckily, I'm not one of them.

DONNA

Like what?

LISA

Like the penmanship on all of these is undeniably consistent with the time period. Like the way all these "S's" are written.

(she zooms in and shows DONNA the pic)

Here.

(she swipes to another)

This one—

(one more)

Here...see? The loop on the bottom of all these "S's" is longer than normal. Very common writing style for before 1915. Even men did it like that.

DONNA

Yeah I noticed that too but wasn't sure it was pre-1915.

LISA

And the stationary is consistent with the class that the writers were in. First and Second Class writing paper had this blind-embossed White Star Line logo which these have. Third class had to use plain paper from clerk's office. Like Jeremiah's.

DONNA

Okay. So, what's so special about the logo?

LISA

Nothing really. I'm more fascinated by the discoloration around it.

DONNA

Why?

LISA

I kid you not, the embossing dye machines for the First Class stationary were gold and Second Class were copper. So if you look around the edges of the Second Class letters you can see that slight shadow...

DONNA

Residue?

LISA

Exactly. The copper dyes would leave the slightest residue. They didn't think that was befitting of First Class because it wasn't considered pristine enough. So, they pressed the First Class with gold. And White Star made sure to tell them that.

DONNA

Unbelievable.

(beat)

Gut instinct?

LISA

These things are as authentic as any relics I've ever seen.

DONNA

She has no idea what she has.

LISA

And she doesn't need to.

(The sound of an alarm is heard. Lights out quickly.)

SCENE 11

1912—RMS TITANIC—MAILROOM

(Three British postal clerks are in the mailroom of the Titanic—JAMES SMITH (not Captain Smith), JACK WILLIAMSON and HENRY MARCH. All panicked. The first few lines should be delivered in darkness.)

SMITH

(panicked and yelling)
I don't know what is happening but I know it's not good!

WILLIAMSON

March, find the light!

MARCH

Did we hit something?! Is that why the engines stopped?!

SMITH

Just find the light, dammit!

(Lights up as MARCH finds the switch)

SMITH (CONT'D)

Williamson!

WILLIAMSON

Yes, sir?

SMITH

Get upstairs and find out what in blazes is actually going on!

(WILLIAMSON stumbles to the door and exits. Both SMITH and MARCH make their way to the small windows and look out.)

MARCH

Can you see anything, sir?

SMITH

Not a thing!

MARCH

Should we head up on deck?

(SMITH thinks. Beat)

MARCH CONT'D)

Sir, should we head// up on deck?

SMITH

//No. Not yet.

MARCH

Not yet? Sir, I think there's a strong possibility that something has gone seriously wrong.

SMITH

I've been doing this job for more years than you've been alive, Henry. And you're in no place// to try and teach—

(sound of running water can now be heard)

MARCH

//I won't be alive much longer if something has gone terribly wrong. Now sir, I implore you—

(SMITH hears the water)

SMITH

Shhhh, shh!

(beat)

Do you hear that?

(MARCH listens. He does)

MARCH

Orders or not, sir. I'm going up.

(SMITH grabs him by the collar)

SMITH

Get a hold of your senses, March! Now, we will go up but we will not go up abandoning our duty. I am the Superintendent of His Majesty's Royal Mail and you are a clerk under my command. And we will not leave this room empty-handed lest we be shamed for not

SMITH (CONT'D)

upholding the code.

(they take a breath)

Now. There are oilskin pouches in the case under the table. Get them out and we will pack what we can into them. They're waterproof and should there be any leak, at least we will have saved what we could.

(WILLIAMSON rushes back in)

WILLIAMSON

Lots of people on deck, sir. We may have struck something.

MARCH

An iceberg? There were warnings—

WILLIAMSON

Some think so but I didn't see any. Could have been a fire started in the kitchen. I'd say we get up on deck with the rest of the passengers and we have to do it quickly, sir.

(SMITH takes in what he just said)

SMITH

(still staring at WILLIAMSON)

Three bags a piece, lads. Fill 'em and then you can head up.

(Lights and alarm fade as the THREE MEN start filling oilskin pouches—like the one DENISE discovered.)

SCENE 12

D'ONOFRIO APARTMENT—KITCHEN

(DENISE and RICHIE are getting ready to have GREG and KIM over for dinner.)

DENISE

Does Kim like kale? I can never remember.

RICHIE

I don't know. Does anyone like kale?

DENISE

Well, I bought a bunch of it. I thought one of them liked it.

(RICHIE shrugs "I don't know." DENISE throws it out. Her phone rings. She looks at it.)

Unknown number?

RICHIE

Don't answer it.

DENISE

(answers it)

Hello?

RICHIE

Thanks for the advice, Rich.

DENISE

Yeah hi, Donna.

(beat)

Yeah, I hadn't really thought about—

(beat)

Oh? Umm..okay?

(beat)

DENISE (CONT'D)

(surprised)

Really? Umm, well ok, that sounds great. Listen, can I call you tomorrow, I'm having people over in a few minutes—

(beat)

Yeah...yup, yup...okay. Great and thanks.

(she hangs up)

Well, that was interesting.

RICHIE

Sounded it.

DENISE

That was the Professor Hartsfield. Gina's friend. The one I met with Thursday.

RICHIE

What'd she say?

DENISE

She wants to buy the letters.

RICHIE

Really? She said they were fake though, I thought.

DENISE

Yeah, but she said that there are classes at NYU that could use them to to study false forensics, I don't know. They have this grant money and they have to spend it by the end of the semester.

RICHIE

How much?

DENISE

Ten grand.

RICHIE

No way, really?

DENISE

(getting excited)

Yeah.

RICHIE

Wow. And to think we were gonna throw them out a week ago. That's great babe.

DENISE

Yeah. She said to bring them all by her office this week and she'd get a check from the chair. If we want to sell them.

RICHIE

(sarcastically)

No, I wanna just throw them out. OF COURSE we should sell them!

DENISE

Yeah?

RICHIE

Yes. They were going out in the garbage anyway. I mean, Kim wants to see them tonight but then next week, they're off to NYU and we're off the the bank!

(Knock on the door. GREG and KIM enter carrying wine and cookies.)

ALL FOUR

Heyyyyyy!!!

SCENE 13

GINA'S APARTMENT

(GINA is sitting alone grading papers with the TV news on)

GINA

(reading a student's answer)

"Beethoven was deaf which is why he wrote a lot of loud music." Well, that's one take.

(she writes a grade and grabs the next paper and reads)

"The Beatles were one of the most influential rock groups of all time. They formed when John Legend met Elvis Presley—" Aaand, not reading any more of that one.

(she continues to grade as we hear the TV NEWS ANCHOR)

TV NEWS ANCHOR

And finally tonight as we continue with Titanic week, we'll be broadcasting a part of our 1967 interview with one of the survivors of that fateful disaster, Miss Eva Hart, who was just seven years old at the time of the sinking.

GINA

(looks up at the TV, then to herself)

Eva Hart?

(EVA—55 now, is being interviewed)

**NOTE: This can either be staged with two actors or just voiceovers...your call!*

INTERVIEWER

And what do you remember about that night.

EVA

Well, I clearly remember my father, Benjamin, putting me on my mother's lap in one of the lifeboats. After I was settled, the ropes began to lower. He said he would get a lifeboat later, once all the women and children had been safely evacuated.

(GINA watches now with intense interest)

INTERVIEWER

And that's the last time you saw him.

EVA

Yes. And heard him.

INTERVIEWER

Do you remember the last thing he told you?

EVA

I do. He removed his sports coat and handed it to my mother. He told us to stay warm.

INTERVIEWER

And this was the same sports coat which contained your mother, Esther's letter?

EVA

Oh, yes. She found it the next morning on the Carpathia. She had forgotten she had even written it and put it in there.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still have the letter?

EVA

Oh no. I wish I did but it's long gone. I never knew where she kept it. She never wanted me to read it. She was always ashamed about her fear of that ship. And then thought that it was her fear that brought that night to fruition. No, I have no idea where that letter ended up.

(GINA turns off the TV, grabs her coat and quickly exits)

SCENE 14

D'ONOFRIO APARTMENT—LIVING ROOM

(DENISE, RICHIE, GREG and KIM are all sitting around, laughing, having a great time together.)

KIM

(in mid-funny story)

So then..so then, I go to tell Greg to turn the phone off—

GREG

Yeah, even though there's 25 seconds left and the Knicks are down by 3—

KIM

So I'm like, "Greg! Your daughter is about to come on stage and you're distracting everyone around us—

GREG

Yeah, so I'm like, "fine" and as soon as I turn it off I hear this huddle of like six other guys behind me go, "Aww."

DENISE

Well, you did the right thing. I'd much rather take my chances with a mob of six angry dads instead of not listening to Kim.

(they all laugh)

RICHIE

(getting up)

Who needs a refill?

GREG

I'm good.

DENISE

Yeah me too.

KIM

I could use one but I think I've waited long enough to see those letters.

RICHIE

(to GREG)
Dude, you told her?

GREG

She dragged it out of me.

DENISE

Guys can't keep secrets.

RICHIE

(to GREG)
You are so weak. I'll get the drinks.

(RICHIE exits)

DENISE

I'm excited for you to see them. Even though they're fake, they're pretty cool to look at. Whoever created them did a great job.

(RICHIE comes back with a soda for KIM and the bags of letters. KIM starts looking through them.)

KIM

Oh look at these. These are so cool.

(KIM shuffles through the letters looking at each one)

DENISE

Yeah, Richie and I think that they were either made for the musical revival and the prop master left them behind somewhere or from one of those replica shows the museums do.

KIM

(studying them even more closely)

Uhhh, huh.

RICHIE

Either way, it's okay with us. Denise tell them about the call you got before.

DENISE

Yeah so the woman at NYU was like, even though they're fake, the attention to detail is so good that they can use them for their phony—

RICHIE

False.

DENISE

False Forensics classes or something.

RICHIE

Offered us 10 G's for all of them.

GREG

Seriously?!

RICHIE

So, who's up for Atlantic City next week?

(GREG is! KIM keeps looking at the letters and gently rubs one, then puts it right up to her eyes to look as closely as possible)

GREG

(to KIM, re: the letter)

Do uhh..you two wanna be alone.

KIM

Who told you these were fake?

DENISE

Gina's friend. Professor Hat-something. She teaches this kind of stuff there.

KIM

(suspicious of this)

Uhh huh.

DENISE

She agreed with Rich about the prop master thing. Why?

KIM

Because the detail on some of these is way too telling.

RICHIE

What are you saying, Kim?

KIM

I'm saying that Gina's friend is full of crap!

(the other three look at each other)

Okay look, you see this discoloration around the embossed logo.

DENISE

Yeah..?

KIM

This is Second Class stationary. First Class didn't have that.

RICHIE

So, what does that prove?

KIM

It proves that unless this was the most detailed prop master in the history of the American musical theatre, that these are most likely real letters. At least some of them.

DENISE

She said that too. She said that even if by some miracle these were actual letters, that they're pretty much worthless because they're just old letters that were mailed in Queenstown or Cherbourg.

KIM

Even if that's the case, they're definitely not worthless.

DENISE

So why would she lie?

(There's a knock on the door. RICHIE gets up to get it)

KIM

Listen, I'm not saying anything. I mean, this is just a—

GREG

Obsession?

KIM

Hobby of mine. But I'm just saying, if I were you, I'd hold off on taking that ten grand and put this stuff in front of a real appraiser.

(RICHIE re-enters with GINA)

GINA

Sorry. I know you have company. D, can I speak with you for a sec?

(DENISE and GINA move over to the side)

GINA

I think there might be something to those letters. Like really something. Did you say you have one from an Eva Hart or Esther Hart?

DENISE

Esther Hart, yeah. Why? I didn't really look at those, I was way more interested on the ones in the pouch. I mean if any of them were going to survive the sinking, it would have been those. What about it?

GINA

The letter went missing decades ago. Her daughter...

DENISE

Eva...

GINA

Yeah, Eva was interviewed in 1967 and talked about how it went missing. It's supposed to be really valuable because it's one of the only known letters to be written on the afternoon before it sunk. Esther put it in her husband's sports coat that afternoon and then he put that same coat on her when she entered the lifeboat. That's how it survived!

(DENISE and GINA head back into the living room)

DENISE

Kim...Esther Hart? Anything?

KIM

Oh, yeah. That's been sought after for a long time. Got lost in the mid-twenties I think. Forgot he put it in her husband's jacket. Denise if you have that letter in here, we shouldn't be touching this with bare hands. Heck, we shouldn't even be breathing on it.

DENISE

What if I did?

KIM

Well then. You have one of the most valuable Titanic souvenirs ever.

RICHIE

Really?

KIM

And it's worth probably hundreds of thousands.

GREG

Why that one more than the others?

KIM

It's one of only two letters known to have been written on April 12—the day it struck the iceberg. Esther wrote hers in the afternoon. The other was written that night and even references how the boat's lights went out—which was a result of the collision. That one is the crème de la crème. Worth a lot more than Esther Hart.

DENISE

And who wrote that one.

KIM

A young Irishwoman...Kathleen Dillon.

(RICHIE stands up. What?! Blackout.)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1

D'ONOFRIO APRTMENT—KITCHEN—THE NEXT MORNING

(DENISE, wearing rubber gloves, has every letter spread out amongst her kitchen table. She paces around them, looking intently, leaning down to read a few lines, adjusting them. RICHIE enters.)

RICHIE

(in his funniest, old-time, wealthy tycoon voice)
Well, good morning, darling. Shall we have Cheerios for breakfast or maybe just some gold bars with syrup?

(He ends with a funny wealthy tycoon laugh—yuck yuck)

DENISE

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, Rockefeller.

RICHIE

(normal voice)
Up so early already?

DENISE

I couldn't sleep. I'm surprised you could.

RICHIE

I'm not. After what Kim told us last night, I had the best sleep I've had in months.

DENISE

(still examining letters)
Well, good for you, babe.

RICHIE

So, what's all this. One final goodbye?

DENISE

I'm trying to sort these and—I don't know—make sense of it all.

RICHIE

So, you've been at this all night?

DENISE

Well, this and rewatching a thousand YouTube documentaries and interviews.

(picking up a letter)

Remember Ramón—

(lights up on RAMÓN)

—the guy from South America who survived another sinking 40 years earlier?

RICHIE

Yeah?

DENISE

I saw an interview with his nephew—Enrique's son. He said Enrique had never forgiven himself for his brother's death. Imagine, he spent years trying to convince Ramón to travel again. He wanted to see him badly. And Ramón wanted to see him too. It took Ramón decades to summon the courage to get back on a ship and the x factor was that telegraph. The Marconi telegraph.

(Lights up on two separate small telegraph rooms—one on the Titanic and one on the Californian. One man is in each. The Titanic telegraph operator is busy. They speak as they telegraph.)

CALIFORNIAN

Californian to RMS Titanic. Many icebergs on course.

(beat)

Say, old man, stopped and surrounded by icebergs.

(beat)

Californian to RMS Titanic. Heed warnings.

TITANIC

Would you shut up! I'm busy!

(lights out on telegraph rooms)

DENISE

They were fifteen miles away. Cecil, the telegraph operator for the Californian, figured, "Oh well, I tried." He shut off the machine and went to bed—at 11:30.

RICHIE

And what time did the iceberg hit?

DENISE

11:40.

(beat)

All of a sudden now, Titanic wanted to talk to the Californian. But they only had one operator as opposed to Titanic's crew. And he went to bed. Ten minutes before. Could have been there in under an hour.

RICHIE

Wow.

DENISE

The irony, right? Ramon was put at ease with the new technology, and in a weird way, it was that same technology that pissed off the Californian. And they shut down for the night. Enrique never forgave himself.

(beat)

(picking up another letter)

Ellen. Imagine how Ellen's mother felt. Here she was, suffering from some illness so she pushes Ellen to travel without her to her son's wedding. Fearing she would never recover. Well, she did and could have taken another ship had she listened to her daughter. And she had to live with that guilt and pain for the rest of her life. Here she thought her illness would kill her...it killed her daughter instead.

(beat)

Her brother—the one whose wedding she was going to—Ended up having six kids and 19 grandkids. One of those grandkids was an historical consultant for the movie. She talked about it on Conan.

(beat)

Every single one of these letters has a story like that. They're living, breathing documents. You see those pictures and those films of the people on that ship. Every single one had a story...like us. They're all like us.

SCENE 1A

DONNA'S OFFICE AT NYU

(DONNA sits at her desk and is on the phone. LISA is there as well.)

DONNA

Hey Denise. It's Donna Hartsfield again. It's been a few days since we spoke and I was just wondering if we could finalize our purchase. The chair is chomping at the bit to get a look at those look-a-likes—like—this week.

(LISA makes a face, DONNA thinks it sounded better in her head.)

So, call me back when you get this and we can get you your check. Take care.

(she hangs up)

LISA

Smooth.

SCENE 2

DR. ALTON'S OFFICE—COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

(DR. SAMANTHA ALTON, (50) one of the world's most respected, independent appraisers of historical artifacts welcomes DENISE and RICHIE, holding a strong box, into her office.)

DR. ALTON

Ahh, yes please, please come in.

(shaking hands with DENISE)

Denise.

(shaking hands with RICHIE)

Richard. I'm Dr. Alton. Please, sit, sit. Would you like anything? Water, coffee?

DENISE

I'm fine.

RICHIE

No, thank you.

DR. ALTON

Well, better yet. If what you're here to show me is authentic like you say, it's best to not have liquids in the general vicinity. So...may I see?

DENISE

Of course.

(They all put on their gloves and RICHIE opens the strong box. He places the oilskin pouch on the table as well as a plastic bag. DR. ALTON approaches it.)

DR. ALTON

May I?

DENISE

Of course.

RICHIE

Just be careful.

(DR. ALTON shoots him a look like 'you don't need to tell an appraiser that')

DENISE

We kept the ones that were originally in the pouch in the pouch. The other random ones are in the bag, in the plastic cases.

DR. ALTON

So, so interesting.

(DR. ALTON holds one letter under a lightbox, then another, then another)

Well, the water damage is consistent with salt water for sure. The aging decay lines up perfectly with our timeline...amazing.

(DENISE and RICHIE look at each other, cautiously hopeful.)

May I see the others?

(RICHIE takes out two plastic cases from the plastic bag. He opens one and hands it to DR. ALTON. DR. ALTON looks at it for a moment, then smiles.)

Esther Hart. Well, I'll be.

(beat as she looks at it)

This one's been lost for decades. And I know Jamie Macnamara. She's a close friend.

DENISE

Who's that?

DR. ALTON

Jamie? She's Esther Hart's great-granddaughter. Eva's granddaughter. Been searching for this since she was a child. I've been helping her on and off. When I had the time. I just never pictured it just falling into my lap. It almost seems too good to be true.

RICHIE

Any idea what it might be worth to them?

(DENISE hits his arm)

(to DENISE)

What?

DR. ALTON

Oh, I'm sure they'd pay all they could to get this back into the family. But you want my advice, you'd get 1,000 times more at Sotheby's. Open auction. The amount of Titanic buffs out there is astronomical.

RICHIE

We were thinking the same thing.

DENISE

Do you think Jamie would be willing to authenticate it for us? Would she know.

DR. ALTON

I'm sure she would, but why wait?

(DR. ALTON goes to her desk and pulls out a folder)

RICHIE

What's that?

DR. ALTON

(thumbing through pages of paper)

This is a copy of the RMS Titanic's passenger log. The book where all who boarded needed to sign their name. And, I also have copies of other letters Jamie gave me that Esther had written.

(DR. ALTON places them on the table and compares the handwriting on each)

(long beat)

DENISE

Similar?

DR. ALTON

Actually, no.

(DENISE and RICHIE shared a defeated look to one another)

Uncanny. A perfect match.

(DENISE and RICHIE breathe a sigh of relief)

Although, to be honest, I didn't really need to compare them. This is for you guys. I've

DR. ALTON (CONT'D)

been looking at Esther Hart's writing samples since the mid-nineties. Here look—

(DENISE and RICHIE look at all the letters)

Her "T's" and "B's" have that same lower-left to upper-right slant. In all of these. The spacing between ending letters checks out. In every single one. Like many pre-1915 handwriting, the bottom part of the "S's" is longer than normal. Every single example here matches. Each letter is like a photocopy of the other.

If you wanted to bring this to auction, I would have no issue certifying its authenticity. For any of them.

DENISE

Wow. That's amazing. Thank you, Dr. Alton.

RICHIE

(looking at the other plastic case)

There's still one more.

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