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Opening extract from

Titanic: An Edwardian Girl's Diary, 1912

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Sunday, 14th April 1912
RMS Titanic

This morning, we went to a religious service in the dining saloon. I took great solace from this, which suggests that I may be more devout than I would have estimated. At St Abernathy's, we attended some form of mass every day, and it became part of the fabric of my life. The sight of nuns and priests came to be a comforting one to me. This mass was being called a Divine Service, presumably so that passengers of every faith would feel comfortable attending. Second- and third-class passengers were welcome, but not as many took advantage of this as I would have thought. Many of the ones who did come took unobtrusive seats, or stood, in the back of the crowded room. I was very tempted to join them, but knew that it would upset Mrs Carstairs, and so I just stayed where I was.

Rather than a clergyman or priest, the service was led by Captain EJ Smith himself. I know he is very busy commanding the ship, but he also mingles in passenger areas sometimes. He has a formidable

appearance, with his dense grey beard and solemn eyes, but his voice is soft and almost melodic. Everywhere he goes, people want him to stop and talk to them, and he seems to be unfailingly polite. Mrs Carstairs is somewhat miffed that we have yet to dine at his table, although today we are to have lunch with the Purser, Mr McElroy, and the affable ship's doctor, Dr O'Loughlin. She feels certain that if her Frederick were here, her social standing would rise considerably.

At the service, we were each handed a copy of the White Star Line's Book of Prayer. Many of the prayers and psalms were familiar, while others had a specific nautical theme. The orchestra accompanied us on all of the hymns, which culminated with a rousing chorus of "O God, Our Help in Ages Past".

At one o'clock, the bugler called us to luncheon. At St Abernathy's, bells summoned us throughout the day; now, I respond to a bugle. This may or may not be progress.

As we are going to be at a more prestigious table than usual, Mrs Carstairs told me to change into my yellow dress and to take extra care with my hair.

Most of our mealtime conversation concerned an endless stream of questions directed towards Purser McElroy and Dr O'Loughlin. As senior members of

the crew, it is expected that they are privy to special snippets of inside information. There was much talk about the ship's performance, and whether the rumour that we might reach New York on Tuesday night, rather than the following morning, is true. One gentleman at our table – I forget his name – even wanted to know if the tales of icebergs ahead were reliable. Most of these questions were dodged with vague generalities. So my tablemates moved on to compliments, and complaints about many of the ship's amenities. These, Purser McElroy addressed with more authority.

I, of course, concentrated on savouring my meal, since I was ravenous. It would not have been appropriate to eat before the Divine Service, so I had declined breakfast this morning. I had been afraid that this would offend Robert, but he said he was only too pleased to respect my wishes. I *did* sip some tea, and we talked a little about what it had been like for him growing up with five sisters and three brothers in Liverpool. It sounded as though he had been raised in a close and jolly family, even though he said that he and his brothers had got into "many a scrap". I admitted that while I preferred only to remember the happy times, William and I had been known to have a row or two ourselves. A row or *three*, William probably would have said.

During my third course, Dr O'Loughlin smiled across the table at me. He has white hair, and seems terribly kind. "You do not suffer from a delicate constitution, do you, child?"

"I embrace culinary excess, sir," I said, and he laughed.

"Spoken like a true Edwardian!" Purser McElroy proclaimed, and more people chuckled.

After that wonderful feast, I was content to read in my room, while Mrs Carstairs napped. Before it was time to dress for dinner, we went to the Purser's Office, so that she could retrieve some of her jewels. Then we stopped by the wireless office, so that she could send a telegram to her son-in-law, to let him know that she might arrive earlier than expected. The young men working in the Marconi room must be somewhat overwhelmed with work, judging by the huge stack of messages that were waiting to be delivered.

That evening, it took Mrs Carstairs much longer than usual to get ready. She wanted me to help her arrange a singularly intricate hairdo, but my efforts on her behalf were clumsy. In the end, she summoned a friend's maid to assist her, all the while directing me to watch *very closely* so that I would be able to do it myself next time. I suspected that she was overdressed, but

soon discovered that elaborate evening gowns with an abundance of accessories were the norm tonight. The men wore black dinner jackets and looked very debonair indeed.

I was a little unsteady in my new shoes, but put them on to make Mrs Carstairs happy. My green silk dress felt very sleek. Mrs Carstairs also gave me an extra pair of her gloves, which reached almost all the way to my elbows!

Anyone who had accused me of being hoity-toity at this particular moment would have been absolutely correct.

When we walked into the Reception Room for pre-dinner cocktails, the sight of my fellow passengers decked out in their very best was impressive. Trains and bustles, stylish jackets and stoles, furs and pearls, lace and satin, gold and emeralds, each more decorative and festive than the last. Tonight is an extra-special occasion as people will be concentrating on their packing tomorrow.

Mr Hollings fetched Mrs Carstairs a glass of wine, and me some mineral water. When it was time to go in for dinner, his stodgy young friend, Mr Kittery, glanced over, looked again, and then offered his elbow to me. This gave me the sense that my appearance – or

at least the quality of my silk dress – was moderately successful tonight. Mrs Carstairs reminded him, sharply, that I am only a young girl, and he should behave in a gentlemanly manner. Since all he wanted to do was share yet another series of tales about his many polo exploits, I think her concern was misplaced.

Everyone in the dining saloon seemed to be in high spirits, and animated conversations raised the usual noise level. I tried a raw oyster for an appetizer, and found its salty intensity a bit much. The next course of cream of barley soup was more to my liking. No sooner had I laid down my spoon or fork than my plate was swiftly taken away and replaced by a fresh one.

The stream of silver platters borne by restaurant stewards came at a steady pace. Among other treats, I enjoyed roast duckling, château potatoes, and creamed carrots. For dessert I selected a chocolate éclair with vanilla ice cream. By now, I was quite satiated, and saw no need to avail myself of the traditional cheese-and-fruit course.

After a repast like that, it was almost surprising that any of us were able to *walk*. Some of the passengers seemed rather tipsy, but it was all in the spirit of celebration and good fun. Tonight's concert by the

orchestra was even more stirring than usual, and I sipped a raspberry cordial throughout.

It had become so cold that I took Mrs Carstairs's advice and wore my pink coat when I walked Florence. It may have clashed with my gown, but there were very few people outside to notice. As a rule, there are many affectionate couples strolling about, but tonight, the frigid temperature seemed to have dissuaded most of them, and I often had full stretches of deck to myself. Fortunately, there was no sign of the rude gentleman with the cigarettes.

The sky was so astoundingly clear that I stopped and gazed up in outright fascination. The ocean was so smooth that it looked like glass, and the stars had an incomparable brilliance. The moon had yet to rise, but the starlight more than compensated for this. What an extraordinary evening it had been!

Once Florence was safely situated back with Mrs Carstairs, I treated myself to a comfortable soak in the tub and changed into my nightdress. I have been writing quite furiously ever since, but am beginning to feel drowsy, so I think I will stop soon. It is past eleven-thirty, and I am looking forward to a peaceful night.

Robert, of course, has already appeared with hot

chocolate, which I am still sipping. After that gargantuan meal, I have no appetite for biscuits, but the cocoa is delicious. We did not have much time to talk, because one of the other passengers is feeling somewhat queasy, and Robert was waiting for Dr O'Loughlin to come up and examine him. However, in the morning, I am sure we can—

A very strange thing just happened. My hand seemed perfectly steady, and yet I spilled part of my hot chocolate. It was as though there was a jolt, and the hot liquid just slopped right over the edge. Perhaps the seas are beginning to get rough? Oh, I hope not, after such a tranquil time so far.

I am afraid Mrs Carstairs will be upset when she finds out that I have stained my new nightclothes with chocolate. Maybe I should put them to soak in a washbasin, and change into my old nightdress from St Abernathy's.

There seems to be some commotion out in the passageway, so maybe I will go and see what is happening. Maybe other people noticed the jolting sensation as well?

