

I know that this sounds terrible out loud, but I already knew I was smarter than my mother.

It's really not her fault; she grew up in a family that taught her not to speak or think. Be seen and not heard, you know, all the junk they told women then. I might have ended up like her, if we had gone to America as planned, but I guess sometimes life doesn't work the way you expect.

By the time I was about ten I realized I could outsmart my own father, even though I could never let him know that. The only person who ever let me be smart was my grandfather, he didn't tell me not to think or to stay stupid. He liked that I could add bug numbers in my head, and was the only person who didn't ask me to be dumb.

But when I turned 12 in 1912, my parents wanted to move away, away from England, away from my grand parents, they wanted to come to America, something about a fresh start, and this 'American Dream' thing everyone was talking about. They'd heard about this great new ocean liner, the biggest one of its time, Mother could only travel the most fashionable way possible, of course. It was going to New York City that spring, and despite it's size they called it unsinkable. It was called the Titanic.

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The deck of the ship was filled with an overwhelming amount of people, rushing back and forth, carrying all kinds of luggage, going every direction. A teenager in a suit leads my family to our room.

My eyes moved all around the room, I was so surprised by the size of it, I figured on a boat things would have to be smaller, but I guess not for us. We all walked on a thick plush carpet, it was greenish, with strange designs on it. There were lamps all around the main room, and a large, gold-framed mirror above the fireplace. In front of it were two cushy reading chairs that I just wanted to curl up in. My father loved to throw money around, and I guess on the ocean things wouldn't be any different.

"Mr. Filingsworth, I trust everything is to your liking?" the teenager asked, carrying the last of our luggage into the room.

“Yes, well...” My father paused to swipe his hand across the mantle, and then examine it. “I suppose it’ll do” he finished, as if describing small cabin that would just have to do.

My parents went to clean up for dinner and told me to entertain myself and wait for them. I was afraid to go far, so I just went back to the top deck and walked around it once. The ship hadn’t left yet, so there were still thousands of people rushing in every which way, a chaos that actually excited me. It was kind of nice to think these people were going nuts over something I didn’t have to worry about.

I thought about how long it would take Mother to get ready, and figure I’d better walk around again. This time I count.

Ever since I was little and learned how to, I counted everything, cars on the road, how many red, how many blue. Anything that cam in numbers, I counted. I guess maybe it was for security, I was worried if I had stopped counting, maybe I’d forget how.

So on that lap I do just that. I count how many men I see: 16, women: 13, but they travel in packs, like animals. Suitcases: at least 4, but maybe 5, Children: only 2, Lifeboats: 20, with 65 seats each, some looked smaller, but I guess I could round up. That didn’t seem like a lot, but with the size of those rooms, it had to be enough.

At dinner my mother arranged for me to meet the builder of the ship, something only rich folk like us could do, I suppose.

“Alice, I’d like you to meet Mr. Andrews” My mother flashes her bright, sparkling smile, and I try my hardest to imitate it.

“How do you do Mr. Andrews?” I tried to say like a grown up, as I shook his hand. I could tell Mr. Andrews wasn’t expecting a child, and for some reason this seems to make him nervous.

“Well, hello, Alice” He greeted me in a thick Irish accent “Sometimes, younger passengers are nervous about bigger boats, so if you have any questions, I’d be happy to help you out” He said with fake jolly, and started to walk away.

“Actually, Mr. Andrews, I do have some questions.” My words made him freeze, and hesitantly turn back to me. I stepped toward him, and he shifted onto his knees to match my height, I was short for a twelve-year-old.

“Anything, Alice” He said, but his gritting teeth said otherwise

“How many people are aboard this ship?” I asked intently, my mother was distracted and could not save Mr. Andrews from my questions.

“Well, according to the records about Twenty two hundred, that’s a lot Alice, more than have ever been one ship”

I fought the the urge to roll my eyes, *Yes, I know how many twenty two hundred is* I wanted specifics.

“How many, exactly?” I persisted.

He exhaled a deep sigh, and after a moment, he quietly said “Two thousand two hundred seventy nine.”

I frowned, *Two thousand two hundred seventy nine?* That couldn’t be right. Sensing my confusion Mr. Andrews asked, “Well, I’m sorry, did that upset you?”

“No sir, I’m just confused. Earlier today I counted the number of lifeboats to be 20” I said, trying to sound grown up. “Each life boat held about 65 people, with a few smaller ones, right?”

“Yes, Alice” he said, sounding almost impressed with my counting skills “What’s wrong with that?”

I double-check the numbers on my fingers *No, I counted it right.* “Well, wouldn’t that mean that there is less than 1,300 seats on the lifeboats combined? That’s not nearly enough.”

He sighed again, the spoke, carefully.

“You’re right Alice, that’s not nearly enough. You’re a very clever girl, figuring that out, not many people care to think about it. My original design contained 36 lifeboats, but the crew decided to take a few out, because they took up too much deck space and--”

“But that’s completely irrational” I interrupted

He let out a quick chuckle.

“That’s exactly what I said, but I guess when you call a ship ‘Unsinkable’ people take you a little more seriously than you’d hope”

“Unsinkable...” I repeated “But how can you be sure?”

He looked at me again, and his face changed, like he was remembering that he was talking to a child. He took a breath to answer but before he could my mother, who had apparently overheard that last part decided to interrupt us.

“Gosh, Alice don’t be so ignorant, If Mr. Andrews calls this unsinkable, *I* choose to believe him”

She pulled me away, clearly not knowing what the word ignorant meant.

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When the Titanic actually hit the Iceberg, I was supposed to be asleep. My parents were both out, it was about 11 and they had put me to bed an hour before. But since I had some trouble sleeping on a constantly rocking ship, I was awake, strolling around our main living room, feeling the plush carpet between my toes, and warming my hands at the fire.

Everything was calm, until randomly came an awful scraping sound, and what felt like a horrible rumbling of the ship. I had this terrible feeling in my stomach that told me something had gone wrong.

Still, It could have been anything; *I have no reason to think anything has gone wrong.*

I thought about the frequent talks I’d been having with Mr. Andrews the previous couple of days.

“The way the ship is built, even if we were to hit something, we’d have a way to stop it in time. You see, there are 16 watertight compartments at the bottom of the ship, if the outside of the ship is torn, and water were to start pouring in, the boiler door automatically lowers and seals off any water from spreading.”

“But if enough water gets in, even if it’s not spreading, wouldn’t the weight still carry the ship down?” I asked.

I tried not to think about his answer to me, and instead went looking for my parents. There were people in the hallways, who just seemed confused, their faces lacking the utter terror I was wearing at the moment. Some were returning to the parlor, someone in all the hustle-and-bustle I overheard the words “A giant finger along the side of the ship.” I wasn’t sure what that meant, but I didn’t have a good feeling about the whole thing.

The more I thought about possible outcomes, the faster I ran toward the crew at the front of the boat, even though I knew they wouldn’t talk to kid.

I got to the front just in time to hear two men in uniform yelling to each other.

“Mr. Murdoch! What was that?”

A man I’m assuming was Mr. Murdoch replied “An Iceberg, sir. I hard-
astarboarded and reversed the engines but she was too close. I couldn’t do anymore”

I gulped really hard out of pure terror. I didn’t know what starboarded meant, but I knew what an Iceberg was. Mr. Andrews’s words rang in my head.

“Well it would take more water than you’d expect, you see, because of the size of the ship, one water-filled compartment is not heavy enough to take it down, in fact two of the compartments could fill and we’d still go on with afternoon bingo.” He said, trying to lighten the mood.

“But,” I countered, persistently, “What if it’s not a smaller hit? What if the hit takes three compartments right off the bat?”

By the time I found my parents, all 3 of us were in life jackets, waiting in the center of the deck. My father continued with an official sounding conversation with another man in a suit. My mother was chatting with another women, and laughing at how other women looked in their life jackets. I stood, silent, nervously biting my nails.

An officer called for women and children in the center of the ship to climb onto a lifeboat, I anxiously moved toward it but my mother held me back. In fact, no one seemed to want to get on the boat, and everyone was quiet, until the man my father was talking to a minute ago, Mr. John Jacob Astor, spoke up.

“We are safer here than in that little boat” he said, arrogantly, and then he laughed, along with my mother and a few other adults standing with us. My father however looked uneasy with the whole situation. He looked at my mother and I and told her that we ought to get on the boat.

“Look at this whole situation, Roger, this ship isn’t going anywhere, and I’d really prefer not to leave my luggage here, unprotected, and spend my next few hours on a little rowboat.”

I’m sure my father was about to say something, but instead, I intervened.

“Look mom, this ship is going to sink with your valuables in it, whether you stay with them or not. In about 2 hours this ship and everything in it will be at the bottom of the ocean, we might as well make sure we’re not with it, because I’m told death isn’t a flattering look on anybody.”

I looked out of the corner of my eye and saw Mr. Andrews. He just looked at me for a moment, and gave a subtle nod.

My mother looked at me, then my father looked at me, then they looked at each other. It was the first time I’d ever spoken like that to her. It might also be the first time she’s listened.

Surely enough the two of us were loaded on to a lifeboat, looking back at my father, and he swore to meet us afterward. As the boat lowered to sea level, he waved at us, and smiled, solemn, but promising.

Bye daddy, I thought. Hoping that two hours would be enough for him.

I wrapped my arms around my mothers waist, and we sat in frozen silence as our little boat rowed away from the disaster behind us.