

JOURNEY TO PORT

By

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Author's Note:

This novel is a work of fiction. All of the main characters are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons is purely coincidental. Although the shipwreck mentioned in this story is real, the causes as written herein are a figment of the author's imagination. None of the events described in this story occurred. No foul play was ever listed as a cause of the fire. Though settings, buildings, and businesses exist, liberties may have been taken as to their actual location and description. This story has no purpose other than to entertain the reader.

PROLOGUE

Chapter One

September, 1856

Anne was so excited. She could hardly believe her fortune was finally changing for the better. Left an orphan at an early age, she had been taken in by an elderly aunt. Anne knew her aunt loved her but she had always been a cold woman. As well as never showing any warmth towards her niece, the woman had also never failed to let Anne know how fortunate she was to have a home with her.

Aunt Edith had inherited a large house from her father. Edith's mother had died in childbirth and her father had never remarried. Being brought up in a lonely loveless environment, Edith never learned how to give any love, although she did care for her niece in her own way.

Aunt Edith had six spare bedrooms and she had taken in boarders to earn extra money after her father had passed away. As soon as Anne was old enough, she helped with the cooking and cleaning chores. By the time she was seventeen, she was running the boarding house for her aunt. That was eight years ago and although Anne did not mind helping her aunt, she had never been paid anything for the work she did. In addition, her aunt constantly reminded her how lucky she was to have free room and board.

Anne lived in the sleepy little fishing village of Port Washington, Wisconsin about twenty-five miles north of Milwaukee. There were roughly a thousand people living in the town, so practically everyone knew everyone else.

Anne could gaze at the steamers from her room on the third floor of the boarding house and when she had a free hour in the afternoon, she would walk down to the waterfront and watch the boats unloading people and cargo. Several ships came to the pier daily and often Anne would make up scenarios of where the travelers were coming from or what destination they were headed to.

One of Aunt Edith's boarders, who had been traveling on one of these "majestic palaces of the lake", had told Anne that the world was a book and those people who did not travel read only a page.

Edith had taught Anne how to read which was unusual for girls of those circumstances in that day. Every once in awhile, a boarder contributed a book to Aunt Edith's "library." There was not a lot of books but Anne had read every adventure and tale of other lands that had been left there.

Anne longed to see other places and often dreamed of sailing away on one of the steamers, preferably with the man she loved by her side. Often she would chide herself for thinking such foolish thoughts but she realized the day she quit dreaming was the day she would die, so thoughts of far away journeys continued to dominate her musings.

The town's residents recognized Anne as she walked to the pier and they would smile as she strolled by. They knew how hard she worked for her aunt and admired her.

A terrible scandal had erupted in Port (as the locals referred to the town) that summer. The farmers in the area were sure they would get better prices for their grain if only the railroad would come to town.

And so, many farmers mortgaged their land and put the money into a Railroad Corporation. Actually, sixteen miles of rail had been laid, starting from the north side of

Milwaukee but then the president of the Rail Company had absconded with the funds and everyone who invested in the company lost all their money. The farmers were left holding worthless engraved certificates of stock.

It would take another fifteen years before the rails would be laid and until that time, the steamers continued bringing in the immigrants and ship supplies through out the Great Lakes region. Actually, the tragedy was a blessing in disguise. When the railroad finally did come to the area, the farmers would end up flooding the market with their grain and that of course lowered their prices. But in the summer of 1856, the focus was on all the money and land the farmers had lost not what the future held.

Anne felt sorry for those families who had so much taken from them but at the moment her primary focus was on keeping the house going for her aunt. Breakfast and dinner were included for the boarders and this kept Anne extremely busy most of the day. Besides the chores around the house, there were also many errands for needed supplies from downtown. By early afternoon, when the bedrooms and the kitchen were finally cleaned, Anne would set off for whatever provisions her aunt needed. This also gave her the opportunity to walk to the pier and look at the ships as they passed through the port.

The one place Anne hated to go to on her errands was the hardware store. The store was owned by Kathryn and Jessie Anderson.

Kathryn and Jessie's son had drowned in an accident several years previously. Kathryn had never gotten over the accident. Grief had consumed her and she constantly bickered with Jessie, even though he had been out of town on a buying mission when the tragedy had taken place.

Kathryn had decided in her warped thinking, that if Jessie had not been gone, she would not have had the baby near the docks that day. They had been married for fifteen years but the boy had died ten years previously and everyone knew Kathryn would never come to terms with it. Each year, she seemed to lose a little more of a grip on reality.

One warm afternoon in June, as Anne walked to the pier, she saw Jessie standing in front of her gazing out at Lake Michigan.

Without thinking about what she was saying, Anne blurted out, “why do you let her yell at you like that?”

As Jessie turned, he saw a woman of medium height, who looked about ten years younger than he was. She had blondish white hair and the bluest eyes he had ever seen. Her Scandinavian heritage was very obvious. She was very slender in contrast to his wife who had become extremely heavy after the accident.

“Excuse me?” Jessie said with raised eyes.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Anderson. I shouldn’t have said anything. It’s just that I saw you there looking out at the water and you had the saddest expression on your face that I have ever seen on anyone. I heard your wife yelling at you in your store a little earlier today and it doesn’t seem fair that you always have to put up with her complaining.”

Jessie was about six inches taller than Anne and had the same color hair as she did but his eyes were a very dark brown. He smiled at her and asked, “You own that house that takes in boarders, don’t you?”

“Oh, no, I don’t own it. My aunt owns it. I only help her out and I get free room and board.”

“She doesn’t pay you?”

As Anne shook her head no, Jessie, with a kind smile said, “It seems we are both being taken advantage of in some way.”

“I never thought about it like that but I guess you’re right, Mr. Anderson.”

“Please don’t call me Mr. Anderson. My name is Jessie and I hope you will call me that.”

“My name is Anne.”

“Well, it was nice talking to you, Anne. Maybe we can speak again sometime.”

“I would like that. Thank you, Jessie,” Anne said rather timidly.

Anne smiled all the way back to the boarding house. She had no friends since she was so busy working for her aunt. And, most of the boarders treated her like a servant because they knew it was her aunt who owned the house.

Having a friend—someone she could just talk to--was something Anne had always desired. She assumed she would not get a chance to talk to Jessie again but at least she could smile at him when she went into the hardware store. Maybe that would lift his spirits and she would not hate going in that store as much anymore.

Little did Anne know there would be more than smiles between her and Jessie that fateful summer.

Chapter Two

Anne was puzzled after her initial encounter with Jessie. After that she and Jessie started running into each other two or three times a week down at the pier and Anne could not help but wonder why that had never happened before. It was a very harmless flirtation. The two of them would chat for five or ten minutes and then be on their way.

One day Kathryn looked at her suspiciously when she saw Anne come into the store and give Jessie a big smile. But then Anne turned around and seeing Kathryn gave the woman a nice smile, too. That alleviated Kathryn's fears but she decided she would keep her eye on the girl whenever she came in.

Kathryn realized her husband only stayed with her because he felt sorry for her. Having had no physical relations since the death of their son, Kathryn knew men were always looking for physical pleasures. Frankly, she was shocked that Jessie had stayed celibate for so long. And she knew that was the case because she hired a private detective whenever he went out of town to watch him and report back to her.

It was early August and time for the annual Maritime Festival. There were fishing contests and people from the surrounding towns also came into Port to enjoy the festivities. That evening there was a dance outside in the local park. It was a beautiful warm evening and the stars were shining brightly above, casting an inviting glow over the city. There was even a full moon that cast a path of light across the lake.

Anne normally did not go to the dance but one of the ladies had taken ill and had asked Edith if Anne could fill in by helping with the food service. One of the boarders had agreed to take Anne along with him. Since Anne was going to be properly escorted,

her aunt had acquiesced. Personally, Anne was not concerned whether she went to the dance or not. She would have preferred staying home and resting up for the following workday but she also liked to help out if someone in town needed her.

When they arrived at the festival, the woman who had been sick, was now feeling much better and Anne was told she was not needed after all. The band started to play and Anne saw the boarder, who had brought her, take off for the beer tent down the street.

Not knowing whether to go home or stay, Anne wandered around and finally sat in the background under a tree. She decided to listen to the music for a little while before returning to her aunt's house. She did not hear him but rather felt Jessie as he sat down next to her.

"I'm surprised to see you here, Anne."

When Anne explained what had happened, including the boarder taking off for the beer tent, Jessie appeared quite upset.

"He should never have left you alone here, Anne."

Anne just shrugged her shoulder. "What could possibly happen to me, Jessie? No one has ever been interested in me. I am just a poor girl and no one could possibly want me. I gave up on the idea of finding a husband years ago. My aunt is in excellent health and I see myself cooking and cleaning for her for many more years to come."

"It's not fair, Anne. You are so beautiful and such a good person. You know people in town talk about how loving and helpful you are, especially taking care of your aunt's house like you do. Edith has no idea how lucky she is to have you."

"My aunt has been very good to me. She took me in when I was a small child. I know it wasn't always easy for her."

“Not easy for her! Anne, don’t you realize how much richer your aunt’s life is, in more ways than one, since you came to live with her? She is the one lucky to have you.”

Anne looked at Jessie strangely. No one had ever told her that before. In a way, she had been brainwashed for years by her aunt and she had never considered that she was giving more in their relationship. She also was still thinking about the fact that Jessie had said she was beautiful. That amazed her more than anything since no one had ever told her that before.

“Thank you, Jessie, for being so kind to me. I can’t tell you how much I value our friendship.”

“I am the one who is lucky to have been able to have a friendship with you, Anne.”

At that moment, the band began playing a popular slow dance of the day.

“Anne, will you dance with me?” It’s dark and we are way back here by the trees. No one will see us here.”

“Jessie, you are married and it probably isn’t a good idea.”

“Please, Anne. You know my marriage is a sham and I haven’t held anyone in my arms for such a long time. Sometimes I really miss a human touch.”

To be truthful, Anne had never danced with anyone before and she was a little nervous about being clumsy or stepping on his feet but she soon discovered she had nothing to worry about.

With his left hand outstretched, he took Anne’s right hand in his, while his right arm encircled around her back. As his right cheek pressed against her left cheek, Anne

danced with Jessie as if they had been dancing with each other for years. Jessie lowered his head towards her, burying his face into Anne's hair and neck, enthralled by her scent.

Getting acquainted previously, probably made dancing together easier for both of them. Anne and Jessie had been talking often in the last few weeks and had gotten to know each other quite well. They had talked about their dreams and plans they wished for. Anne had even told Jessie about her idea of traveling on one of the steamers on a great adventure. She really hoped that she could someday sail across the lake to a new life.

In the shadows Jessie lifted his head towards hers and as they gazed into each other's eyes, they felt that they were finally where they both belonged. So taken by emotion, they ached to be closer to each other. As Anne continued looking at Jessie, she realized she was with the love of her life. As they continued swaying to the music, Jessie's left arm reached around Anne's waist, while both of her arms encircled his neck and as his lips descended on hers, she felt passion for the first time in her life.

They both had endured such a great emptiness in their lives that Anne felt no fear when Jessie led her into the woods. Although Anne had never experienced any feelings like this before, she felt no shame as Jeremy removed her clothes. She did not know how she knew what to do but she found herself removing Jessie's clothes while he was taking hers off.

Their lips stayed pressed together but all Anne felt was an incredible ache that she needed more from Jessie. And when he granted her wish, although there was a little pain at first, she found she needed to be closer and closer to him, until they finally exploded together in sheer ecstasy.

Even Jessie was shocked. He had relations with a few women before he had married Kathryn but he had remained faithful to her all these years. He had never before felt the pleasure he had just received with Anne, probably due to the fact she gave of herself so openly and freely to him. He hoped he had not hurt her too much. He realized she was a virgin and he felt a great humility that she had committed herself so completely to him. He knew, like Anne, he had been extremely fortunate to have encountered the real love of his life and he felt incredibly lucky to have found her.

They both knew their lives had been changed forever that evening. Jessie told Anne they would have to be careful from now on that no one ever saw them together. They began making plans to escape from their lives in Port. Although the hardware store belonged to Jessie, he would leave it for Kathryn so his wife had a source of income when he left. After the death of their son, Kathryn's whole life had revolved around running the store and he was not sure what she would do if she lost that part of her existence, too.

For the last few years, Jessie had been doing odd jobs for people in town and they would always pay him in cash. His wife did not know about the money and he had been stashing that money away for years, for his old age, he told himself. He had never planned to run away but his mother had always told him to save for a rainy day.

Kathryn took care of the books but ever since their tragedy, her thinking had become radically altered. She never wanted to spend money on anything and Jessie just thought it was important for him to have a supply of cash tucked away in case he ever needed it. Since he would tell his wife he was going on a buying trip, he could also take

a tidy sum out of their bank funds. He and Anne would have a good stake for their future together wherever they wanted to live.

Letting his wife have the hardware store was the least he could do, he reasoned. Plus, it took away any sense of guilt he might feel for leaving Kathryn. Jessie realized he needed a few weeks to get his plans for their escape in place and told Anne they would leave sometime towards the end of September.

Anne could not believe how her life had changed so dramatically in such a short time. She wondered if this would have ever happened if the boarder had not offered to take her to the festival. She realized she would never know the answer to that. It was very strange how fate took a hand when you least expected it. But Anne had no idea how her life was about to change very dramatically in ways she could never have conceived.

But for the present, all she could think of was their future together. Jessie's embraces were like a drug to Anne. She had never known anything so intense could happen between two people and all she could think of was being with Jessie as a family the rest of her life.

Chapter Three

Anne and Jessie were careful not to be seen alone together. They quit meeting at the pier because they didn't want anyone to get the idea there was anything going on between them. They knew people would start talking even if it was an innocent thing, which of course it was not. They knew mere coincidence would not describe what was going on between them. However, at the same time, they could not stay away from each other either. Their new found feelings, as well as their need for each other, were too great for them to be apart for very long.

They began to meet every night. Aunt Edith, as well as the boarders, was always asleep by 9:00 p.m. and usually sooner. Jessie's wife was also asleep by 9:00 p.m. Jessie was not too concerned about his wife finding out since she had insisted on separate bedrooms ever since their son's death. They would stay in their rooms until 10:00 p.m. and then slip out to meet each other.

Anne's aunt had a separate building that had once housed her father's horses behind the house. There was a large studio above the stables but there had been no one living in the apartment for many years. It was in bad disrepair and her aunt had felt it would cost more money to make it habitable than she could ever recoup in income.

The stable was behind the house and since it was up a slight incline almost a block from the main road, no one could glimpse the building as they passed by the house. Anne knew it was the perfect place for her and Jessie to meet, especially since he did not want her roaming far from home in the dark at night. She had cleaned the place up a little and had put fresh straw on the bed she found there. She and Jessie spent many hours

together in that little room. They should have been sleep deprived but they were too wrapped up in each other. Every moment they were able to spend together was very precious to them. They would leave about 4:00 a.m. to go back to their homes to sleep a little before their daily work began. Days passed quickly as they looked forward to each night spent together. And, the September deadline they had set for leaving was fast approaching.

For years, Anne had kept a journal but unknown to the girl her aunt had read it off and on for many years. Knowing her niece had no life but working in the boarding house, Edith had not looked at it for a couple of years. Frankly, her aunt thought it was pretty boring, especially the longings of a young girl who would never realize her dreams.

Anne recorded every moment she and Jessie shared together but she kept the small notebook well hidden so there was no chance her aunt would find it. She had no idea her aunt had given up reading the journals years ago or even knew of their existence.

Jessie had told her that they would go to Sheboygan on the evening of Tuesday, September twenty third, to catch the steamer, the Niagara, the next day when she came into port. He had decided they would go to Michigan to start their new life together. He did not think anyone would find them there and he wasn't too concerned anyone would even bother to look for them.

Jessie knew his wife would make up some story of him being killed on his business trip to save face when he did not return. And he felt most people in town would think Anne had run away from her overworked life at her aunt's house. It would just

seem like a coincidence they both had disappeared at the same time and townsfolk would never link the two of them together.

Jessie had already booked the tickets and had them hidden in his bedroom. Kathryn never entered his room so he knew she would not find them. Lastly, he mentioned to his wife, the need to go on a buying mission before winter set in. He had two reasons for his need to tell Kathryn about his trip. First, if any notice came from the shipping company about his travel plans, his wife would not be suspicious and second, it was the only way he could withdraw a large sum of money from their bank account without her wondering why.

Towards the end of the first week in September, Anne awoke very sick to her stomach. She reasoned she had caught the flu since one of the boarders had had it the week before. By the end of the day, she felt much better and thought she must have contracted a very mild case.

That evening she told Jessie about her illness and he was also happy she felt better so quickly. However, the next day she was sick again. She once again felt better by dinner and so she did not say anything to Jessie that night. When Anne continued to be sick for a week, she became worried something more serious might be wrong with her. Plus she was apprehensive she would not feel well enough to go on the ship with Jessie.

That night she confessed to Jessie about her illness and her fear of not being able to go with him. At first Jessie had a very concerned look. She realized he also was worried about her and then all of a sudden he began laughing.

She looked at him as if she could kill him.

“Jessie, this is not funny!”

Jessie continued to laugh and Anne found herself getting angrier with him.

“Jessie, stop that right now.”

As Jessie wiped the tears from his eyes he said, “Oh Anne, don’t you realize what this means? You have to be pregnant. We are going to have a baby. After all this time, God is going to give me another son.”

Anne stared at him with her mouth wide open. Pregnant! She could not be having a baby. And then she remembered back two years previously when the wife of one of the boarders had been pregnant. She had been sick just like Anne. And she had confided to Anne that she was going to have a baby.

The couple had lived at Aunt Edith’s another four months which was long enough for Anne to realize she still had a good two months of being sick before she started feeling better. How would she ever keep her not feeling well a secret from her aunt? There was still another ten days before she and Jessie were leaving.

It began to look like Anne and Jessie were destined for a lot of good fortune. That next morning, Aunt Edith awoke with the flu the boarder had and she ended up spending the next eight days in bed recouping. Anne realized her aunt was much better after the third day but she liked the excuse of being waited on in her room all day.

Anne really did not mind taking care of Edith since she knew her aunt was feeling better. And, at the same time it enabled her to keep her condition secret from the woman. She was also enjoying all the extra attention and help Jessie was giving to her.

Jessie explained to Kathryn that Edith was sick and there were some problems at her house he wanted to fix for the woman. In that way Jessie was able to come by the house for a few hours each morning and help Anne with some of her chores. All he

wanted was for the evening of September twenty third to come quickly. Once they made their escape, he would make sure Anne had a much easier time of it for the rest of her pregnancy.

However, the good luck the two of them thought they were surrounded by was not to be. Fate was going to take a hand and events were about to spin out of control. But for the present, the two lovers could only dream of the wonderful life they were sure they would spend together and the baby who would complete their family.

Chapter Four

One night Kathryn also became sick with the flu that was being passed around. She had obviously caught it from someone who had come into the store. She became so ill that even though she usually never bothered Jessie, that evening around midnight, she went to his bedroom for help.

Kathryn was shocked when he was not there. She went back to her room and continued to be sick off and on all night. She finally heard Jessie coming into the house around 4:30 a.m.

Putting two and two together, Kathryn realized Jessie had been spending a lot of time at Edith's boarding house and wondered if the woman's niece was the cause of his absences.

The next morning after Jessie left, Kathryn feeling a little better, sent for the private eye. After she sent the man on his mission, she went up to Jessie's room. It did not take her long to find the two tickets for the Niagara. She realized immediately the significance of the tickets and knew the private eye would quickly confirm what she suspected.

It was two days later when the detective reported to Kathryn and the news was much worse than even she suspected. The man had pretended to be a boarder and watched the two of them in the morning while Jessie helped Anne with her chores. He had also eaves dropped on the two of them on the ground floor of the stable for the last two nights. The couple had not been very quiet because they never suspected anyone was listening to them, since they were a distance from the sleeping house.

When Andy, the private eye, told Kathryn the girl was pregnant, Jessie's wife lost the last thread of sanity she had been hanging onto. If she had been deprived of a child, there was no way she would allow Jessie to have a child without her. She might have tolerated an affair for awhile but never a child.

Andy knew how unstable Kathryn was and he saw an opening that could benefit him and change his life for the better. He told Kathryn that Jessie would not live to see his baby born.

In return, he wanted half interest in the hardware store. After a reasonable time of mourning, they would marry. It would be a marriage of convenience. Andy assured Kathryn he would never bother her for sexual favors and they would have separate bedrooms like she now had with Jessie.

Kathryn agreed to his terms but she also wanted the girl killed. She would tolerate no baby born that belonged to Jessie, whether he was living or dead. Andy decided it was probably better not to have any witnesses left alive and told Kathryn he would make sure Anne was taken care of, too.

Both Kathryn and Andy decided the best place to kill them was on the steamer. There would be too many questions if something happened to them in Port.

And so Anne and Jessie spent many happy days continuing to make plans for their departure without realizing what Kathryn and Andy were plotting.

Chapter Five

Anne was very curious about the ship she was going to sail on. One day when she was down on the dock, she asked the harbor master about the boat.

Having been coming down to the pier at every opportunity for years, the harbor master smiled at her. He knew she wanted to sail away someday for parts unknown and since he had a little extra time, he decided to humor her.

“She’s a work horse of a boat, Anne. She has a wooden hull two hundred thirty feet long and there are three boilers. She was constructed eleven years ago. She’s had a little bit of a troubled life. One time she ran onto a rock reef in the fog and had to be pulled off and another time she collided with a brig which quickly sank. The railroad had her built so she could run along the shore of Lake Erie. But once the railroad was completed, she has spent the last few years sailing out of Buffalo to Lake Michigan ports. And she hasn’t had any trouble since.”

Anne shivered a little hearing the history of the Niagara. She remembered her aunt always saying how events seem to happen in threes. Anne however, quickly returned to her previously happy state, knowing that she and Jessie were about to embark on a great journey. She thanked the harbor master for his information and he smiled at her, hoping that someday she really could go off on a great adventure.

Finally, the twenty third of September dawned. Anne was too excited to even be very sick that morning. She told her aunt she did not feel well and went straight to her room as soon as she finished her morning duties.

Aunt Edith, knowing how sick she had been with the flu, thought Anne should stay in her room the rest of the day. She did not want everyone in the house to be infected by her niece, especially if she was sick while fixing dinner. Anne could not believe her luck. Knowing they would not get much sleep that evening, she rested quietly in her room all afternoon. After dinner had been served, the cook brought Anne some soup. She was so excited she could hardly eat but knew she needed some nourishment.

Anne had packed a few clothes into a valise she had found in the upstairs stable room and had stuffed it under her bed. Since her aunt never went into her bedroom, she knew the suitcase was safe there. Jessie had told her to not take too much. They would buy new things when they reached their destination. Plus, Jessie knew it would not be long before nothing fit Anne anyway.

Anne had sewed an oilcloth pouch with a belt to put their money in and she had also made room to tuck in her latest diary. Jessie did not want anyone on the ship to try and rob him and he thought it would be safer for Anne to tie the money around her waist under her dress. He surmised no one would ever have a reason to look there and the money would be in as safe a place as possible that way.

After the cook went home and everyone was in bed, Anne pulled the valise out from under her bed and stole into the kitchen. The cook had made ham for dinner and Anne made two large sandwiches for Jessie and herself. It was not long before Jessie was knocking on the kitchen door. He gave Anne a quick kiss as he helped lift her into the carriage.

It was a little less than twenty miles up to Sheboygan. Jessie thought it was important for no one in town to see either of them get on the Niagara, especially together. Because of that, he hired a driver from the Sheboygan area to come to Port to take them to the ship. The man had come down the previous night and Jessie had rented a room downtown for him to sleep in. That way he would not be tired during his drive to the boat. It was a long ride to Sheboygan and would take them all night to get there.

As soon as they entered the carriage, Jessie took Anne's left hand and slipped a gold wedding ring on her fourth finger.

"I know we aren't married Anne, but I feel more married to you than I ever did to Kathryn. I want you to wear this ring so you will always be reminded of how much I love you. I think it's important you appear to be my wife on this journey and besides a married woman is always safer."

A small tear ran down Anne's cheek. She loved Jessie with all her heart, ring or no ring, but she knew he was always thinking of what was best for her. Although no minister had ever said any words, she also felt married to Jessie and knew their lives were entwined forever.

The two of them were so excited they hardly slept the entire ride, although it would have been nearly impossible to sleep the way the carriage frequently bounced them along the dusty road. Unbeknownst to them, the private detective had gone to Sheboygan the day before to get there ahead of them. Andy, the detective, also had a valise with him but his duffel bag did not contain any clothes. Rather, he had a couple of bottles of lamp oil, several old rags and a crowbar stuffed in his travel case.

Andy watched the couple the next morning as they pulled into the port area where the ship would dock. He saw them go into a little restaurant to get some breakfast. He noticed that Anne did not look too well and he smiled when he realized how she would look later that day.

It was Wednesday, September twenty fourth, and it was a very quiet and pleasant autumn day on Lake Michigan. The Niagara had left Ontario on Georgian Bay on the twenty second with about three hundred passengers. Some of the immigrants had been let off at Manitowoc, a town to the north of Sheboygan, to make their way west to a new life. But others travelers had boarded the ship there, so by the time they would leave Sheboygan, there would again be about three hundred passengers and crew on board.

Jessie had booked an inside cabin for the two of them. Besides being more comfortable, especially with Anne's morning sickness, he felt there was less chance of running into someone they might know if they were in a cabin.

The room was small with an upper and lower berth and a washstand. Now that Anne was finally on the ship, she wanted to enjoy every second but her stomach started acting up again and unfortunately she spent most of her time bent over the bowl on the washstand in her room. After Anne finished being sick, Jessie would give the bowl to the cabin steward for emptying.

"Looks like you and the Missus will be adding to your family soon," the cabin steward said with a wink at Jessie.

Jessie smiled back while nodding his head in affirmation.

It was about an hour later when Jessie heard knocking on his cabin door. A small boy held out a note addressed to him. Before he could give the boy a penny, he had skipped away.

The captain had requested that Jessie and “his wife” meet one of the captain’s officers by the smoke stacks. The captain had a little gift for the newly married couple. Jessie realized he had told the cabin steward they were just married and did not think too much about the note. He had no idea Andy had been standing close by when he and Anne had been taken to their cabin and had overheard their lie.

Taking a look at Anne again being sick by the basin, Jessie told her he would be right back.

As Jessie approached the smoke stacks he saw a tall man in white pants holding a bag. He assumed this must be the officer.

“Hi, there! Are you the man I am supposed to meet?”

“Where is your wife, sir?”

“She wasn’t feeling well and I left her in the cabin.”

Just then a real officer came walking by. As Jessie turned towards the retreating man, he felt himself being pulled by the arm around the smoke stack and a shooting pain went through him. The supposed officer had struck him hard on the head with the bag he held in his hand. Jessie lost consciousness so quickly he literally never knew what hit him.

Andy knew he did not have a lot of time. He figured with Anne in her cabin she would not stand much of a chance to get out. He quickly ignited the rags soaked in the lamp oil and spread them all around the smoke stacks including on Jessie.

Everything was as dry as tinder and the fire spread very rapidly. Captain Miller, who was awakened in his cabin to the cries of “fire”, realized the hoses were useless, since the fire was spreading so fast. The captain headed the ship towards the shore with all steam ahead and had his men throw stateroom doors overboard for floats and anything else they could find that would keep people adrift.

Two life rafts were safely lowered and got away. Naturally, Andy had been waiting in the area by those boats and secured a place on the first one to row away. Since he was dressed as a ship’s officer, the people in the lifeboat assumed he was in charge of their safety as he quickly rowed away from the burning ship.

When Anne heard the panic on deck she went running looking for Jessie. Before she could even start searching for him, a horde of people pushed her along with them and in the next moment she realized she was in the water.

The lake temperature was very cold and Anne realized how lucky she was to have learned how to swim as a little girl; something many of her fellow passengers did not know how to do. As she swam away from the burning boat one of the stateroom doors came drifting by. With very little strength left, due to the frigid water, Anne climbed onto the door and was carried away from the flaming ship. As she watched several people sinking below the water, a piece of lumber floating nearby hit Anne on the head. She quickly lost consciousness and thus was unaware of the terrible tragedy that continued to unfold all around her.

Six cargo schooners and a steamer came to the rescue of the burning vessel but there was so much panic and confusion few people could be saved, especially since so few knew how to swim and the water temperatures were so cold. Within twenty minutes

there was not anyone left on the ship. Those who did not jump off were burned by a fire that was so hot, it burned metal and consumed anything on the ship down to the water line. Somewhere between one hundred fifty to one hundred eighty lives were lost.

The cause of the fire was never ascertained; it was believed to be caused by an overheated funnel casing and there were only two people alive in the world who knew the real truth about what actually happened to the Niagara that day.

And for obvious reasons Andy and Kathryn had no intention of letting anyone know how or why the fire really started. When Andy's boat came into Port Washington, he quickly went to the hardware store where he told Kathryn what had happened. Then he changed into regular clothes and made his way back to Milwaukee. There was so much confusion going on with the sick and the dead being brought into the harbor, Andy was never noticed.