Murder on the TITANIC

STORY BY JOHN LUTZ
"It's time to solve a murder," Great-grandma Everton said to Ella in a faint but distinct voice. Ella wasn't sure what she meant, and couldn't imagine who had been murdered or why. For that matter, maybe no one had been murdered. Great-grandma was 105 years old and her mind wasn't always accurate.

And according to Dr. Williams, she was dying. So when Great-grandma summoned her only living relative, Ella, naturally Ella responded. Great-grandma was an iron-willed survivor who in another era had lived through the sinking of the Titanic, but even for the world's born survivors, time eventually runs out.

Now 23-year-old Ella sat in the many-roomed house and looked at the frail, pallid figure on the bed. Great-grandma, whose name was Gwendolyn, had been one of a set of attractive twin sisters. Her sister, Gloria, was entombed in the Titanic beneath the sea. It was hard for Ella to imagine that the fragile old woman in the bed had been the vivacious, dark-haired woman in the old photographs of the wealthy and beautiful Everton twins. The woman who went to Australia with her husband, recovered her health, and began a large and prosperous family.

You'll soon be all that's left of the family (Great-grandma began) so it's fitting that you should know the truth of that night. Our mother was worried about us sailing to America on the Titanic because there were bound to be fortune hunters aboard who wanted to seduce and marry wealthy prospects. But despite the warnings, we boarded at Southampton.

What a wonderful ship it was — like a grand palace afloat, with wide, sweeping staircases, palm-decorated verandahs, fancy restaurants, plush lounges and smoking rooms. There was a wide promenade deck — parts of it
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private - and a Turkish bath, gymnasiums, a swimming pool and squash court. And fancy dinners and dances. Like a floating dream...

Gwendolyn (Great-grandma always referred to her younger self in the third person when reminiscing about the Titanic) and Gloria looked exactly alike, and they were bound together by that almost telepathic, love-envy closeness found only in twins. But Gwendolyn had worse luck than her twin sister. She was consumptive and always held a handkerchief clutched in her hand, into which she often coughed, sometimes leaving traces of blood. But they were both young and wealthy, and natural prey for fortune hunters.

The first day at sea, Gwendolyn was strolling on the promenade deck with her parasol and dropped some Titanic souvenir postcards she'd bought. A well-dressed man with thick black hair and twinkling blue eyes helped her to scoop them up before the sea breeze snapped them and carried them overboard.

"I'm Adam Lipton," he said with a dazzling smile.

When Gwendolyn shyly told him who she was, he said, "I know. I saw you and your sister board at Southampton. The fact that you're twins caught my attention, but it was you who held it."

Gwendolyn was flattered, of course. In fact, she was beguiled. But following her mother's advice, she pretended not to be interested.

"I suspect he's attracted to your money," Gloria told her that evening when they were dressing for dinner in the stateroom they shared on B-Deck. They didn't feel as if they were on a ship. The room was lavishly furnished and the vessel's great size tamed the waves so that it was almost as steady as solid ground.

"You don't know him," Gwendolyn said, choosing a pair of plain earrings from her jewelry box.

Gloria looked grimly at her in the dresser mirror. "Neither do you, really. Remember what mother said about fortune hunters."

"We'll see how well you remember it when someone that handsome is attracted to you," Gwendolyn said with a smile.

But at dinner, another handsome young man, seated at their table, seemed to be drawn not to Gloria but to Gwendolyn. He was in his late twenties and had large dark eyes and wavy blond hair.

When Gloria told him he had the sensitive face of an artist, he turned to Gwendolyn and said, "Your sister's right. I'm a playwright." He introduced himself to all at the table. "I'm Louis Bernsword. I'm going to New York to get financial backing for my new bedroom farce, Double-Double - Bed."

Gloria blushed. Everyone at the table laughed.

Conversation and wine flowed freely, the food and service were excellent, and the Everton twins agreed that sailing on the Titanic was marvelous.

After dinner, the twins had drinks in the First Class Lounge on A-Deck, and Bernsword continued focusing his charms on Gwendolyn. Gloria noticed Adam Lipton standing off to the side glaring at Bernsword. But a few minutes later he was all smiles as he joined them, and Gwendolyn introduced the two men.

"I'm an old friend of Gwendolyn's," Lipton said with a wink aimed at both twins.

"I was under the impression everyone here met on board," Bernsword said, obviously eyeing Lipton as a rival.

"There are sharks around here," Gloria said.
“They’re not so much a danger in these waters,” a man nearby said. “The Atlantic’s too cool for them this far north.”

“I wasn’t thinking about the ocean,” Gloria said.

Bernsword looked at her, smiling. “Are you an actress? You and your sister are certainly beautiful enough.”

“Perhaps you can find financing for your new play even before you reach New York,” Gloria said.

Gwendolyn glared at her. “My sister has a suspicious nature.”

“She should be suspicious,” Lipton said. “Two young women of such beauty and obvious means are the natural targets of the unscrupulous.”

“A professional actor couldn’t have said it better,” Bernsword told him.

The conversation might have become more openly hostile if a handsome, bearded man in a White Star Line uniform who’d been making his way through the lounge and introducing himself hadn’t approached the table.

“I’m Captain Edward Smith,” he said. “Are you enjoying the voyage?”

Everyone at the table put aside ill feelings and assured him his great ship was a pleasure.

Captain Smith smiled at the Everton twins. “You two should bring us luck,” he said. “The Titanic has a twin sister ship, the Olympic. Perhaps there’s a set of identical twins on board her, too.” He gave them a little salute and moved on to chat with other passengers.

After leaving the lounge, Gwendolyn and Gloria put on sweaters and went to the promenade deck. Though the night was cool, it was beautiful, and stars shone in the black Atlantic sky like burning lamps almost within touching distance. The twins stopped walking and leaned on the rail, admiring the night sky. When Gloria said something and got no answer, she heard a familiar cough and saw that Gwendolyn had wandered off and was talking with Adam Lipton. They leaned close to each other, and Gloria was sure she saw them kiss.

As Lipton was walking away, Gwendolyn saw Gloria approach.

“Remember that once the ship docks in New York, we probably won’t see anyone who’s on board again,” Gloria said.

“That’s not necessarily true,” Gwendolyn said. She began walking with a sense of purpose.

“Where are you going?” Gloria asked.

“To the First Class Smoking Room. It’s toward the front of the ship.”

“The bow, you mean,” Gloria said. “Just aft of the Verandah and Palm Court. Mr. Bernsword has been teaching me nautical terms.” Gloria obviously enjoyed the twinge of jealousy that showed on Gwendolyn’s moonlit features. So Gwendolyn was interested in the young playwright as well as in Adam Lipton.

In the Smoking Room, Lipton was seated alone at one of the tables, puffing on a cigar. At a nearby table, half a dozen men were engaged in a poker game. Gwendolyn and Gloria were the only women in the room, and they attracted several frank and admiring stares. The sisters were glad to sit down with Lipton so they were less the object of attention.

Gwendolyn gave a soft, muffled cough into her handkerchief.

“Is the smoke in here a bother to your condition?” Lipton asked, his expression concerned.
It's understandable why you're so interested," Gloria said.
Lipton stared at her. "Perhaps you only think you understand."
"So here you are!" a man's voice said.
Louis Bernsword approached the table. He was wearing a well-cut
gray jacket and blue silk ascot. As he sat down without being invited, he and
Gwendolyn exchanged smiles. Gloria and Lipton glared at him.
"Did I arrive at a bad time?" Bernsword asked.
"The perfect time," Gloria said. "We were just discussing how my
sister is an object of fortune hunters."
"That's unfair," Bernsword said. "Unless of course you're talking
about Mr. Lipton. As for myself, I'm genuinely fond of Gwendolyn." He
reached across the table and rested his hand on hers.
"No more fond of her than I am," Lipton said.
"What you're both fond of is money," Gloria told them.
Gwendolyn stood up. "That's a terrible thing to say!"
"It's obvious that you're jealous of your sister," Lipton said to Gloria.
She regarded him calmly but with contempt. "I'd slap you
for that remark, only —"
"He's the type of man who might slap a woman back," Bernsword
interrupted.
He and Lipton stood up simultaneously. Lipton swung his fist at
Bernsword, who grabbed his wrist before the blow could land.
"This isn't the place for that," a man's deep voice said. And a tall, well-
built man who'd been playing cards inserted his arms between Lipton and
Bernsword and forced them apart as easily as if they were quarreling children.
Lipton fell back into his chair, while Bernsword backed up several steps,
almost losing his balance.
"Neither of these lovely ladies wants to see you fight," the man said,
smiling at both Gwendolyn and Gloria. He had a tan face, perfectly even
white teeth, and straight dark hair parted in the middle. "My name's Luke
Bauer, but mostly I'm called Tex. I overheard the conversation, and you're
both so lovely that neither one needs to be jealous of the other."
No one moved or said anything in reply. Tex's size and
obvious strength had discouraged any more physical violence.
Gloria was the first to speak, stammering her thanks to Tex.
He grinned at her. "Well, you are like two beautiful peas in a pod. I'll
escort you to the door while these two gentleman cool down."
Before either sister could say anything, he stepped between them and
wrapped his huge arms gently around their waists. He walked with them
toward an exit. "I hope I see both of you again under better circumstances," he
told them.
"Better circumstances," Gloria said, "would be New York."
"It's a date, then," Tex said.
"No, I didn't mean —"
Grinning, Tex made a motion as if tipping his hat and withdrew again
into the Smoking Room.
"Another fortune hunter," Gloria said.
"You've listened too much to mother," Gwendolyn told her. "Besides,
he seems much more interested in you than in me."
Gloria sniffed as if there were a bad smell about. "He's a gambler. He
knows how to hedge a bet." She clutched Gwendolyn's hand and forced her
along as they walked.
In their stateroom, as the twins were preparing for bed, Gwendolyn stood behind Gloria, who was seated before the dresser mirror and putting up her hair. Both women were in the identical delicate blue nightgowns their mother had given them for the voyage.

"You really shouldn't be so sharp and critical of every man who takes an interest in us," Gwendolyn said.

"It isn't us," Gloria told her, "it's you."

"For heaven's sake, there isn't any reason for you to be jealous!"

Gloria put down her comb and pins and turned to face Gwendolyn.

"Oh, dear Gwen, don't you realize I'm not jealous? Can't you figure out why it's you and not me who attracts the attention of these men?"

Gwendolyn stared at her.

"It's because of your obvious poor health," Gloria said. "These men are fortune hunters. Money and not love is what's drawing them. They want to marry into money. Then they want to inherit - and the sooner the better."

Gwendolyn's face changed as she realized what her sister was saying. She began to cry, then she spun on her heel and flung herself into her bed.

It soon became evident that dozens of men on board were intrigued by the twins. Though no one displayed the ardor of Lipton, Bernswood or Tex.

On the fourth day at sea, a Sunday, the Everton twins had an early breakfast then attended church. None of the suitors made an appearance that morning, as if they'd decided Sunday was a day of rest in their quest for dollars.

But at lunch the sisters were joined by Tex, who was dressed in a wide-shouldered, chalk-striped suit that didn't fool Gloria. This man was trying to look like a cattle baron, but beneath the expensive clothes he was more likely an American cowboy with temporary cash in his pocket. Or perhaps one of the card sharps rumored to be on board. The truly cultured and wealthy could recognize each other without speaking, though apparently Gwendolyn hadn't yet learned the knack.

Tex sat nearer to Gloria than to Gwendolyn. "I did notice a difference between you two lovely ladies," he said with a grin.

Both women stared at him.

"Other than Gwendolyn's cough?" Gloria asked.

"Oh, yes. Miss Gloria, you've got this little mole on your neck just behind your right ear, and Gwendolyn doesn't. But I do declare that's the only difference I can see." He ordered coffee from a steward who'd appeared near the table. Then he leaned toward both sisters. "Do you really think those two fellas who were in the Smoking Room the other night are fortune hunters?"

"I do declare that we've finished lunch," Gloria said, cutting the conversation short. She stood up, and Gwendolyn also stood. "And at least one of us knows a fortune hunter when we see one."

Tex looked up at her, his face serious. "You could be wrong, lovely Gloria."

Ignoring him, she strode away. Gwendolyn followed, but she glanced back and gave Tex a fleeting smile.

"I understand there's danger of ice in these waters," a voice said, when Gloria was taking an afternoon walk on the promenade deck.
She turned to see Adam Lipton smiling at her.

"I'm not Gwendolyn," Gloria said.

"I know. No handkerchief, no coughing up blood."

Gloria knew what was coming now. Like Tex, Lipton had decided to hedge his bet and attempt to woo both sisters.

Lipton removed his hat and held it before him with both hands. "I wanted a chance to get you alone so I could talk to you," he said almost shyly.

Gloria raised an eyebrow. "Did you, now?" she said with disdain.

Lipton moved closer to her and his handsome face took on a sincere expression. "I'm not what you'd call a romantic sort," he said, "but I happen to believe in love at first sight. That's how it was with your sister and me. I understand that you have her best interest at heart, and I admire that. But believe me, I have the same protective feelings about her, and my intentions are the most honorable." He sighed and looked into her eyes. "For Gwendolyn's sake, I want the two of us to be friends. Can you believe me, Gloria?"

"Mr. Lipton, only a smitten fool like my sister would believe you. Now, excuse me." And Gloria turned away from him and walked toward the entrance to the First Class stairway.

"Ice indeed," Lipton muttered behind her.

When the sisters dressed for dinner and dancing that evening, Gloria put on her lovely rose dress. She added a pearl necklace, and gold and coral tasseled drop-earrings. Then she draped a mink stole over her shoulders. She surveyed herself in the mirror and decided she looked stunning.

Gwendolyn wore a simple black dress and carried her everpresent handkerchief in a beaded evening bag. Her one piece of jewelry was a diamond and ruby necklace that had been in the family for generations. But even the necklace couldn't add luster to Gwendolyn. Gloria decided that her sister looked like a drab version of herself.

Both Bernsword and Lipton managed to get themselves seated at the same table as the Everton twins for dinner. In such mixed company, the conversation was guarded and polite. But when Lipton passed the salt to Gwendolyn, his hand brushed hers and lingered for a long moment before withdrawing.

After dinner, Tex appeared and asked Gloria to dance. He did it in such a way that she couldn't refuse without causing a scene.

On the dance floor, she was surprised by how smoothly he led her. But then, smoothness was his business.

"You really shouldn't think so poorly of me," he said, as they glided through a waltz.

"But I don't think of you at all," she told him.

He only smiled. "I'll win you over yet, Miss Gloria."

It was when several dances had occurred that Gwendolyn gave a little cry, like a wounded bird.

"What is it?" Adam Lipton asked in alarm.

"It's missing!" Gwendolyn said. "My necklace is gone!" And she raised fluttering hands to her bare neck.

"Who have you danced with?" Gloria asked immediately.

"Why, a dozen different men. Mr. Bernsword and Tex ..."

"And Adam Lipton?" Gloria asked.

"Yes, I'm proud to say!" Lipton glared at Gloria as he spoke. He'd
spilled wine on his dinner jacket and removed it, and in his shirt and suspenders looked strong and dangerous, causing Gloria to have second thoughts about taunting him.

“The necklace wasn’t necessarily stolen,” another man said.

“It might have broken and fallen off.”

Everyone standing nearby instinctively stared down at the floor near their feet, then in a wider circle.

But the necklace wasn’t found on the floor. Or found anywhere else, after an extensive search. There was some heated discussion about searching the passengers, but most of those who’d been dancing had drifted away.

Gwendolyn was crying softly as the two women left to go to their stateroom.

It was almost eleven-thirty when there was a knock on the stateroom door. Gloria opened it to find Tex standing in the passageway. He smiled. “May I come in, Miss Gloria?”

She stepped back to allow him entry. He nodded to Gwendolyn and gave that little motion as if tipping his hat.

Then he reached into his coat pocket, withdrew the missing necklace, and handed it to Gwendolyn.

She glowed as she accepted it. “Where on earth did you find it?”

“In the lining of Adam Lipton’s dinner jacket that was slung over a chair,” he said. “He must have stolen it when you two were dancing.”

Gwendolyn’s glow disappeared and she looked ashen as she slumped in a chair. “I don’t believe that!” She stuffed the necklace into her white and gold evening bag, as if to protect it.

“I’m only telling you the facts,” Tex said. “I’m sorry if they caused you pain, but the truth’s the truth.”

When Gwendolyn began to sob, Gloria edged Tex toward the door. “Thank you,” she said.

“Maybe you’ll think better of me now,” he told her from the passageway. “I could have kept the necklace.”

“I do think better of you,” she said, “but you can’t know how it is to be a woman of marriageable age and have wealth. There’s no way not to be suspicious of men.” And she closed the door and locked him out of the stateroom.

When Gwendolyn had sobbed for almost an hour, she looked up and said, “I’m going to undress, go to bed and pull the covers over my head.”

“No you’re not,” Gloria told her. “It’s only eleven o’clock. When you’ve made yourself presentable, we’re going to confront Adam Lipton.”

Gwendolyn was too depressed to argue.

But Adam Lipton wasn’t to be found. Maybe he’d discovered the necklace missing from his dinner jacket and realized his crime was known.

The twins were in the First Class Lounge on A-Deck when the ship gave a slight lurch. Several people about to sip their drinks sloshed liquid on themselves and reached for napkins. Others sat and watched their scotch, bourbon or wine rippling in their glasses. Conversation and laughter ceased for a moment, then continued as before. The slight interruption in the ship’s steady, monotonous progress was forgotten.

“We should separate,” Gloria said. “That will double our chances of finding Lipton.”

“I’m not sure I want to find him,” Gwendolyn said, “but I know this is necessary.”
"We all have to summon the strength to do what's necessary," Gloria told her.

For possibly the first time, her sister looked at Gloria as if she understood and believed her. Then the sisters left each other to hurry off in opposite directions.

Gwendolyn was near the Cafe Parisien on B-Deck, and Gloria was in the Verandah and Palm Court on A-deck, when a deafening whistle began blowing over and over. It stopped only for an incredible announcement to be made.

The ship had struck an iceberg, and passengers were to don life jackets and go immediately up on deck.

Her heart hammering, her mind still trying to grasp what was happening, Gloria strode toward the First Class stairway and her and Gwendolyn's B-Deck stateroom where their life jackets were stored.

Men and women were hurrying everywhere, some of them dragging stunned and confused children. No one was panicking yet, but panic was near. The dark fear in their eyes was itself terrifying.

Gwendolyn! Where was Gwendolyn!

Gwendolyn was standing just inside the doorway to a private promenade deck, close to Adam Lipton. She didn't see Gloria notice them, then move back into the shadows and watch and listen to them.

"I stole the necklace only in order to return it to you," Lipton was saying. His voice was pleading, beseeching Gwendolyn to believe him. "I wanted to get in you and your sister's good graces by pretending to find the necklace later. When I returned it, you'd both know I was in love and not interested in your money."

"You must have been shocked when it wasn't where you left it in the lining of your jacket," Gwendolyn told him.

"I was, but it doesn't matter now. Whatever happens tonight, or for the rest of our lives, I want you to believe I really love you. I want to marry you, have children, want us to spend forever together."

Gwendolyn threw her arms around his neck. "I do believe you, Adam. And I love you. I will marry you."

As they kissed to seal the bargain, Gloria hurried on to the stateroom. She was struggling into her life jacket when Gwendolyn burst through the door. "The crew's trying to keep everyone calm," Gwendolyn said, "but the ship is starting to tilt. I think we're going to sink."

"It's not time to be alarmed yet," Gloria told her. "Anyway, there are lifeboats."

"I heard there aren't enough."

"Don't be silly," Gloria said. "There must be rules about having enough boats for the passengers to fit into. It's simple mathematics. Did you find Adam Lipton?"

"No," Gwendolyn said. "I searched but I didn't see him."

"You're lying," Gloria said. "I saw you together. I heard you."

Gwendolyn looked as if she might cry for a moment, then she became defiant. "Adam took the necklace for a reason!"

"Of course. He planned to sell it in New York."

"That isn't so! You don't want us to be together because you're jealous."

"Of you and that cheap confidence man? That's absurd."

"We're going to be married," Gwendolyn said, stepping toward
find anyone I knew. There was only one more space available in the nearest lifeboat, and as a crewman clutched my arm and started to help me into the boat, Louis Bernswold elbowed past us and tried to claim the space. His eyes were wild, and he was clutching a bound sheaf of papers—his play—beneath an arm. The crewman started to deal with him, but suddenly Tex Bauer was there. He grabbed Bernswold around the waist and pulled him back.

And the next thing I knew I was in the boat and it was being lowered to the sea.

Oars were placed in the water, and we began moving away from the Titanic. As we got farther away it became more obvious that the ship was about to sink. Its bow was low and its stern was raised so high that the huge underwater propellers were visible. It was quiet, so cold it was near freezing. Then the band assembled on deck and began to play. The music came to us clearly over the dark, cold water. As we rowed farther from the ship I saw Tex and a subdued Louis Bernswold standing near each other on deck. Tex raised his right hand, and I thought he was going to make his motion as if he was tipping his hat, but instead he pointed to his neck just behind his right ear.

It wasn't long after that when the bow went all the way under, and the ship began its slide into the sea. The music stopped, and people started screaming. We could see some of them jump into the ocean, only to be pulled down by the suction when the stern raised high and the Titanic plunged to its grave and left only black and empty sea. It was so sudden it shocked everyone. In the cold water, it was only a short time before the screaming stopped.

The Titanic sank a little before two-thirty in the morning. It was
about four when we were rescued by the Carpathia, a ship that was steaming toward us but couldn't get there in time to save most of the passengers and crew.

Here the aged Gwendolyn withdrew a withered hand from beneath the covers and handed Ella a large brass key. "That will unlock a room in the attic," she said weakly. "And it will unlock all the secrets. My trunk that washed up after the sinking is there, and some other things..."

Her chin sank to her bony chest, and it was obvious that she was dying. Her last utterance was one of deep regret as she touched a forefinger to her heart: "I didn't mean to hit her there..."

Shaken and confused, Ella wondered what secrets her Great-grandmother meant. Was she confessing to shooting and killing her twin sister just before the Titanic sank? She mentioned a murder, and its solution.

That night Ella and her fiancé, Elliot Nance, went to the attic and used the key. It fit perfectly, and the smell and mustiness of time and the dead past wafted out at them.

Twenty minutes later, Ella sat cross-legged on the attic floor and explained to Elliot what must have happened the night the Titanic sank.

**SOLUTION: Now assemble the puzzle and see if you can uncover what really happened on that fateful night!**
"Ev'rybody put one hand in the pocket and wear gloves with the ice."

"Titanic."

"I'll stagger with him if you try to tuck in your pockets so soft."

"The portrait of their wife on the Titanic caused a lot of fuss at the hotel and my expression."

"One of them was Claire's Everton."

"Ahman Iphon's wife and my great-grandmother was Claire's daughter."

"And Ellis understood the beauty and significance."

"The others must have sufficed more of her long life as she saw in it enough glory."

"Ellis saw on the deck of a massive ship sailing past he was standing on the side of his deck."

"And his moment's glance and learning her knowing she was wrong your mind."

"A hair dresser signed her back a lifetime."

The End