

Time Ablaze

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Adele Weber dreamed of fire and water.

In her dream, she stood on a wooden raft, which simultaneously also existed as a tenement building and a wooden maze. The fire chased her as she ran from one side of the raft to the other. The fire spat smoke at her, so she leaned out of window after window for a gasp of fresh air. The fire threw intense heat at her, so she ran through corridor after corridor, searching for cooler air.

The fire chased her, and so Adele rushed to the edge of the raft, to the front door of the building, to the end of the maze. But no freedom could be found there, because of the water. A sparkling clear blue, it surrounded her on all sides. But it never touched the fire, never even approached close enough to put the fire out. It served as a barrier, trapping her, taunting her. She knew she should remove her dress, undergarments, and stockings and dive into the water, anything to get away from the flames, but modesty and her inability to swim prevented her.

Suddenly an eight-foot-tall figure appeared: Mose the Fireman, spoken of in legend. He wore a leather firefighter's helmet as big as a barrel and a pair of humongous rubber boots, each the size of a sailboat. His coat declared that he was part of the Engine 40 unit. "Hello, little lady," he said. "How can I help you?"

"Please," Adele said. "You must save me from the fire. You must save my family."

Mose the Fireman took a swig of beer from the fifty-gallon keg he kept on his belt. The beer trickled down his thick white beard, and suddenly both beer and beard vanished. "I can't save anyone unless you save yourself."

"But—but you're Mose the Fireman. You rescue people from fires! You swam the Hudson in two

strokes! You've lifted trolley cars out of your path to run to the rescue of babies!"

"I've retired and moved to Hawaii," he replied.

Suddenly, Mose the Fireman wasn't Mose anymore, but her father. Adele watched in horror as her father called out to her in puzzlement. "Adele?"

"Father!" she shouted, but she was too late, as the flames licked closer and closer, filled with glee as they chose between immolating Adele or her father first...

And Adele's nightmare ended. She awoke gasping for air, as she had many times since her father's death, with her body and head wrapped snugly in her blanket.

* * * *

Lucas Schmidt entered eighteen-year-old Adele Weber's life on a Sunday in May. As usual, after services at St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church had ended, the congregants lingered to talk. Cigar smoke filled the air and voices speaking German filled the room, with only the occasional English word as a reminder that the community actually lived in the United States. People eagerly spread news about the everyday events of each other's lives.

Adele and her mother were no exception. They found themselves chatting with Philip Straub and his wife while the three Straub children ran around playing with other children.

Just as the Straubs took their leave, Adele and her mother were approached by Reverend George Haas, the pastor of the church, and a dark-haired stranger.

Haas adjusted his glasses and stroked his salt-and-pepper beard. "Mrs. Weber, Miss Weber," he said in English. He nodded to each one in turn. "And how are you this Sunday?"

"We are doing quite well, thank you sir," Adele replied. Although she returned the nod, her eyes were drawn to the handsome stranger, partly because of his looks but mostly because of his odd behavior. He looked distinctly uncomfortable. He kept his mouth closed, while his gaze darted around the room. Tiny beads of sweat covered his brow, and his hands repeatedly pulled at his collar and tie. Adele stifled a laugh, while waiting for the presumed introduction.

Finally, Haas said, "Allow me to introduce Mr. Lucas Schmidt."

Schmidt nodded. "A pleasure to meet you both."

"Mr. Schmidt," Adele said. "A pleasure to meet you as well. I take it you are new to New York City?"

"Yes," he said. "I am."

"Where do you come from?"

"I—I have just arrived from abroad."

"Really? I'm surprised to hear it. Your accent does not sound like that of the old country."

Schmidt blushed, reminding Adele of a school boy caught in a lie. "No. Um, my family emigrated to England many years ago. I grew up speaking English much more than German."

"Whereas I grew up fluent in both," Adele said.

Suddenly, Schmidt began coughing repeatedly, and Haas pounded him on the back. "Are you all right,

Mr. Schmidt?"

Schmidt nodded and wiped his brow with a handkerchief. "It's all the cigar smoke. I'm not used to it."

"Don't they smoke in England?" Adele asked.

"Um. Not where I come from."

"How strange. Well, welcome to *Kleindeutschland*, Mr. Schmidt."

He nodded. "Little Germany."

There was an awkward pause, and then Haas spoke up. "Mr. Schmidt needs a place to stay. And I seem to recall that you still have that room for let."

"Well," Mrs. Weber said, "that all depends. How old are you, Mr. Schmidt? How do you earn your living?"

"I'm twenty-five, Mrs. Weber. And I work as a journalist."

"Oh," Adele said, a touch disappointed.

Haas smiled. "You'll have to forgive Miss Weber. She was just telling me how scandalous she finds the newspapers."

Schmidt turned to look at her, and Adele shifted under his gaze. "Indeed? Are you a regular reader?"

Adele's mother spoke up again. "My daughter is quite a voracious reader."

"Yes," Adele said, slightly nettled. "I am a reader."

"And you find the newspapers scandalous?"

She sighed. "The newspapers should spend more time reporting the truth, and less time dredging up spectacles."

Schmidt shrugged. "I tend to agree with you, Miss Weber, but I must point out that newspapers need to sell copies to stay in business."

"They could sell just as many copies appealing to man's greater instincts." She sniffed. "Tell me, Mr. Schmidt, for which paper do you write?"

"I work for the *New York World*."

"Oh, Joseph Pulitzer's paper. That's not as bad as some of the others. Given that, I think you'd be acceptable."

"I am honored, Miss Weber," Schmidt said. He turned to Adele's mother. "So I've been interviewed by both mother and daughter. When will I get to meet Mr. Weber?"

Adele and her mother looked at each other. "My father passed away six years ago," Adele said after a moment.

"Oh," Schmidt replied. "I'm sorry."

Mrs. Weber sighed. "He left me to finish raising Adele on my own. But the community has been helpful.

Somehow, I manage to find enough work cleaning offices or taking in laundry to help us live."

"And taking in boarders?" Schmidt asked.

Adele's mother smiled. "Yes," she said. "And taking in boarders. And you do come with good references," she added, nodding at Reverend Haas.

"Then," Schmidt said, "if it's not presumptuous of me to ask, I will need to know my new address."

"We live three blocks south of here, on Third Street." She turned to her daughter. "Adele, perhaps you can help Mr. Schmidt find his way to our apartment?"

Adele and Schmidt exchanged an awkward glance.

"Are you going somewhere, mother?" Adele asked.

"I need to stay for a while and talk with Mary Abendschein about the excursion. I have some ideas for her."

"Excursion?" Schmidt asked. "What excursion?"

"You've come to our community at a good time," Mrs. Weber said. "Next month we'll have a day to get away from the heat of the city."

"When?"

"Wednesday, June fifteenth," Reverend Haas said. "It's our annual excursion to celebrate the end of the Sunday school year. We charter a steamboat for the day, and head out to Locust Grove, a picnic ground on the northern shore of Long Island. There'll be food, fun, music, and games. You should join us if you can get away from work."

"It sounds like quite an outing," Schmidt said. "You said that you do this every year?"

Haas smiled. "This is our seventeenth one. The church started running them in 1888."

Mrs. Weber laughed. "You're being far too modest, Reverend. After all, the excursions were your idea."

"Really?" Schmidt asked.

Haas waved his hands and shook his head, as if to say that it had not been that much of an achievement. "It just seemed to me that it would be nice if we could celebrate the end of the Sunday school year with some sort of picnic. And it's so popular that many of our former congregants return from Yorkville and Brooklyn to join the festivities."

"Some even come from as far off as New Jersey," Adele said. "Such as my uncle and cousins."

"We usually get close to a thousand people," Haas added.

Schmidt whistled. "And what about the program book?"

Adele and her mother exchanged a puzzled glance with Haas. "We didn't mention the program book," Adele's mother said.

"Oh," Schmidt replied. "Well, perhaps I heard it from someone else. But you did mention Mary Abendschein. I would imagine she has something to do with the program book."

“Ah, yes,” Haas said. “Mary is in charge of putting it together, along with many of the other details of organizing the event.”

“I would like to assist her, if I could. It seems like a good way of getting to know my new community.”

Haas smiled. “A capital idea. She only started last month, so I imagine her committee could use one more person.”

“Perhaps Mrs. Weber and Miss Weber could introduce me to her.”

“Certainly,” Adele's mother said. “And then afterwards, Mr. Schmidt, let us escort you to your new home.”

* * * *

Lucas Schmidt did his best to prevent himself from disrupting the Weber family routine. As part of the boarding arrangement, he shared breakfasts and dinners with Adele and her mother. He would come down to the dining room right on time for the morning meal, made sure to leave before Adele's mother or Adele herself needed to start working, and he always returned by the scheduled dinner hour.

He even offered to clean the dishes, or to assist the Webers with the household laundry, much to their delight and amusement.

“Most men of my acquaintance wouldn't do such things,” Adele had told him.

“Does that mean you'd rather I didn't?”

“Oh, not at all. We'll gladly take you up on your offer.” She smiled. “But we'll be sure not to tell anyone, so your reputation remains unbesmirched.”

Schmidt's behavior and appearance enchanted Adele so much that she and her mother decided upon a plan for Adele to spend some time alone with their new boarder. So the following week, Mrs. Weber told Mr. Schmidt that she had been hoping to take her daughter on an outing to Coney Island. “But,” she said, “my health is not what it once was. Still, I hate to disappoint my daughter. Might you by chance be willing to accompany us?”

From behind the back stairs, Adele heard the whole thing. She felt a small thrill of delight when Schmidt agreed. She admittedly had been shocked when her mother had suggested a Coney Island outing; despite the amusement parks that had been there for almost ten years, it still bore a reputation for vice. Still, friends of the Webers had gone with their young children and declared that they had enjoyed the rides immensely—even if they only mentioned it quietly, and away from the pastor and other officials of the church.

“Why, of course I will,” Schmidt replied.

“Thank you. I know how much Adele is looking forward to seeing Luna Park.”

“Luna Park?”

“It's a new amusement park that opened just recently on the location of the old Sea Lion Park.”

“Oh, yes, I remember reading something about that.”

“I would have expected you to, if you work at the *World*.”

That Saturday morning, as the three of them ate breakfast, Adele and her mother completed their plan.

Mrs. Weber told Schmidt that she was feeling under the weather and that perhaps they ought to cancel the outing. Schmidt immediately offered to escort Adele on his own.

When Schmidt got up from the table to carry the dishes into the kitchen, Adele and her mother exchanged a wink.

Shortly after breakfast, Adele and Mr. Schmidt boarded a steamboat to Brooklyn, along with hundreds of other New Yorkers eager to get away for the day. Schmidt, who had been quiet and reserved as they had walked over to the Third Street pier, became slightly agitated when he saw the steamboat. He came to a stop, forcing Adele to fight the crowd as she backed up to where he stood, going back and forth between staring at the boat and looking down at his feet.

"Mr. Schmidt? Are you coming with me or not?"

He looked up, and Adele noticed a slight reddish tinge to his cheeks. "I'm sorry, Miss Weber. I haven't been on a boat in a while."

"I thought you said you came over from Europe. What did you do, flap your arms and fly over here?"

"Something like that, yes," he said with a broad smile.

"Seriously, Mr. Schmidt."

"Seriously, I'm just a tad nervous." He paused. "I just wasn't expecting to board a steamboat, that's all. I should have known better."

"Do you get seasick, Mr. Schmidt?" Adele asked, trying to show her concern.

He chuckled. "No."

"Did you have a bad experience on a boat?" Adele asked.

Schmidt nodded. "Sort of."

"Well, relax. The ferries between Manhattan and Brooklyn run all the time. Nothing's going to happen."

He stared into her eyes for a moment. "Of course, you're right. I would have known otherwise."

"What?"

"I mean, if something had happened to any of the ferries, I would have heard."

"So are we going?"

He smiled. "Yes. Let's go."

Mr. Schmidt paid their fare and they boarded the steamboat. The trip was uneventful, and within an hour they found themselves disembarking at the steel pier at Coney Island. The beautiful blue sky above the beach and boardwalk held but a wisp of white, fluffy clouds. As they walked down the pier, Mr. Schmidt bought a copy of "Seeing Coney Island" for ten cents from a barker, and using the guidebook they found their way to Luna Park.

At the entrance stood a huge stone arch with the words "Luna Park" on a scaffold. Directly in the middle of the arch sat a giant red heart, proclaiming Luna Park "The Heart of Coney Island." Underneath that, carved in stone, were the names "Thompson & Dundy." And underneath that, of course, people

wandered into and out of the amusement park.

Adele and Schmidt joined the crowd walking into the park, and were hit by a variety of sounds and smells. The music of a brass band some distance away mixed with the laughter and shouting of the crowd of people. An odor of hay and manure wafted by, and Adele jumped away as an elephant lumbered by, led by a man in turban and carrying two couples who chatted away, seemingly unaware of the spectacle they were creating. As the crowds parted, Adele had to stick close to Schmidt to avoid being jostled away from him.

“Wow,” Schmidt said. Goggle-eyed, he slowly turned around and stared at everything Luna Park had to offer. Adele turned with him.

After taking in all the sights, Schmidt started pointing to the signs around the park that advertised the rides and exhibitions: Ride the Trip to the Moon! Experience Dragon's Gorge Scenic Railway! Take a Trip to the North Pole! See the new Fire and Flames!

“What shall we do first?” Adele asked.

“Fire and Flames looks interesting,” Schmidt said, pointing in the direction the sign indicated. “Let's go see that.”

“I'm not sure,” Adele said. The name Fire and Flames made her uncomfortable. She studied the other signs, and then asked, “Wouldn't you rather ride the Trip to the Moon?”

Schmidt looked her in the eyes. “I'll make you a deal. First I'll go with you to the Moon, and then you come with me to see the Flames.”

Reluctantly, Adele agreed. The two of them walked in the direction of the Moon ride, which was housed in one of the more modest buildings, past the huge Electric Tower with the sculpted dragon at the base.

They joined the long line in front of the building. Eventually, they reached the front of the line, and Schmidt handed over two dimes for their admission.

Workers ushered them and the other spectators into a cavernous room, in the middle of which sat a rounded spaceship that came to a point at one side. They were gently herded into the spaceship and asked to take seats in one of the rows. Adele took a seat next to a porthole, with Schmidt next to her.

A few seconds after the door closed, the spaceship started to rock back and forth. Looking out the portholes, Adele saw the walls vanish below, replaced by blue sky, which darkened until the only light came from pinpoint stars.

“Amazing,” she said, almost breathless with wonder. Schmidt made no comment.

Very soon after, the Moon appeared as a small rock in one of the portholes. It got larger and larger, until finally it swung below, disappearing from view, and the ship stopped rocking and came to a stop with a sudden thump.

“What now?” someone asked.

“We explore the Moon,” said the pilot.

He opened the door to the spaceship, and the spectators exited. No longer could they tell that they were still in the large room of the building that housed the ride. Instead, to all eyes, it appeared as if they stood on the populated surface of Earth's nearest neighbor. Everywhere they looked were caverns and grottos.

Giants and midgets dressed in elaborate silver costume greeted them, along with a man on a throne who claimed to be the Man in the Moon. Dancing moon maidens gave the spectators pieces of green cheese to take back with them as souvenirs of their voyage. Eventually, the pilot ushered all the paying customers back into the spaceship, and after a slightly shorter trip, the ship “landed” and they were escorted outside into the bright sunny day on Earth.

Adele noticed that Mr. Schmidt had a bemused expression on his face. “Did you enjoy that?”

“I thought it was rather quaint,” he said.

“Quaint? The Trip to the Moon is quaint?”

“Well, it’s just an interesting picture of the future.” He smiled. “Are you ready for Fire and Flames now?”

Adele repressed a shudder. “I’m ready.”

Once again, they stood on a long line, and when they finally got to the front, Mr. Schmidt handed over two dimes for their admission to the theater. They took seats among the rows of other spectators, and waited for the curtain to lift.

Finally, once all the seats were filled, the curtain rose on a fake street that looked very much like one of the streets in Little Germany. Behind the street stood several tenement buildings, in front of which peddlers pushed their carts, children ran around, and men and women walked with purpose to their daily errands.

Suddenly smoke and flames emerged from one of the windows high up in a four-story tenement. The crowd of people, who had been moving in all directions, stopped in their tracks to stare up at the window. Then they started running around again, screaming, “Fire! Fire!”

Faces of women and children appeared at other windows near the one with the fire. Their screams rended the air as the fire spread first to one window, and then to the next, until the entire upper floor of the building burned in flame.

It wasn’t just the performers in the building and on the street who reacted. The spectators also began to jump up in their seats, screaming for someone to rescue the actors.

Just when it seemed as if there would be no hope for the unfortunate souls trapped in the building, a fire bell clanged and three fire engines sped down the makeshift street. Ten firemen grabbed hoses and began spraying water on all sides of the building, while another ten grabbed ladders and placed them along the building, so that the trapped residents could descend quickly to the safety of the street below.

A few people in the windows screamed that they couldn’t reach the ladders, and another group of firemen rushed over with safety nets. They called out “Jump!” and the last people trapped in the building’s top floor jumped into the nets, to thunderous applause from the audience.

The crowd roared with exhilaration, and even Mr. Schmidt joined in with great enthusiasm, but not Adele. She felt faint.

“Mr. Schmidt,” she whispered.

Schmidt turned to look at her, and his mouth fell open. “My God, Miss Weber. Your face is so pale. Are you feeling okay?”

“Please get me out of here,” she said.

"I don't understand."

"I thought I could take it, but I can't. I'm sorry."

"What are you talking about?"

She waved her right arm around, gesturing at the other members of the audience, who remained transfixed by the spectacle. "How can they watch this? How can they sit here unmoved by the horror?"

"It's a disaster spectacle. Entertainment."

"I can't believe it. Although I suppose if people are going to gather at a fire for entertainment, it's better they do so at a fake fire than at a real one."

Schmidt cleared a path for the two of them, escorted Adele to a bench in a far corner of the park, and brought her a cup of water. She drank deeply.

"Are you feeling better?" he asked.

Adele nodded. "I think so. I just can't believe it."

"I couldn't believe it either when I first read about it. That's why I had to see it for myself. I have something of an interest in fires." He paused. "I just didn't realize that it would affect you this way."

Adele remained silent for a few seconds. Then she cleared her throat and spoke. "My mother and I never told you how my father died."

"No," he said after a moment. "You didn't."

Adele looked away from Mr. Schmidt. She looked into the distance, where the beach melted away into the huge ocean. "He was walking home from work one evening when he heard shouts of a fire in a tenement. The firemen hadn't arrived yet, and there were women and children trapped inside. Father threw off his coat and ran into the building, to try to rescue them." She paused. "He never emerged."

"I am sorry, Miss Weber."

"Mother couldn't bear it. I had to identify the body."

"That ... that must have been difficult for you," Schmidt said quietly, while the noise of the park still surrounded them.

Adele shook her head, trying to dismiss the memory from her mind. "Fires are far too common in our world. I was but a young twelve-year-old girl when that building he ran into went up in flames. Ever since then, I've had recurring dreams of fire."

"Ironic," Schmidt said softly.

"Why is that ironic?" Adele asked.

"Oh, um, no reason," Schmidt replied, with a wave of his hand. "I wish I could have met your father. It sounds like he was quite the heroic man."

Adele grunted. "Hm. I sometimes feel that the more heroic choice would have been to ignore the screams of strangers and stay alive for his family." She smiled. "Selfish of me, I suppose."

"You're entitled to such feelings. But why didn't you tell me about this when I suggested seeing Fire and Flames?"

"I—I didn't want you to be disappointed."

Schmidt took her in his arms, held her for a moment, and then released her. "Are you ready for another ride?"

Adele shook her head; the emotional roller coaster she had just gone through felt more intense than a real one would have been. "Actually, I'd like to go home."

"But we barely got here," Schmidt said.

Adele looked him in the eye. "Mr. Schmidt? I think I've had enough stimulation for one day. Please?"

He sighed. "Very well, Miss Weber."

The two of them rode the next ferry back to Manhattan.

* * * *

After that day, Adele saw less and less of Mr. Schmidt. In the mornings, he would scurry off before breakfast, calling out that he would pick up a muffin or roll on his way to Newspaper Row. In the evenings, after returning to his rooms, he would go out to assist Mary Abendschein in getting shopkeepers and business owners to purchase advertisements in the excursion journal.

This bothered Adele, because even taking into account the disastrous trip to Coney Island, she had come around to her mother's way of thinking. Lucas Schmidt did seem to be a man of good prospects, and his pleasant appearance certainly made him favorable in Adele's eyes.

But his recent secrecy worried her. Was he avoiding her simply because of her behavior at Luna Park? Or was there another, more sinister reason? There were many stories of criminals who passed as decent, hard-working men. Suppose Mr. Schmidt had fooled Reverend Haas? Suppose her mother had opened their household up to a man who planned to run off with their possessions? Or worse yet, murder them in their sleep?

Adele admitted to herself that these thoughts were more flights of fancy than real concerns, but she still had a devouring curiosity about Lucas Schmidt. And so, one Monday, in the middle of the day when she had little to do, Adele walked downtown to Newspaper Row, on the eastern edge of City Hall Park.

The *New York World* was housed in its own tower that sported a tall golden dome on top, so Adele found the building with ease. She maneuvered her way through the newsboys on the street as they shouted the headlines in hopes of getting her to buy the latest edition of whatever paper they were hawking. The big news story was still the murder of Caesar Young by Nan Patterson, his mistress. Adele rolled her eyes at one of the newsboys and pressed her way into the building. She approached the reception desk where a bored-looking man sat.

"Yes?" he asked.

"I'm here to see Mr. Lucas Schmidt. He's one of your reporters."

The man checked a printed list on his desk, running his finger down it for a moment. Then he looked up at Adele. "What was the name again?"

"Schmidt. Lucas Schmidt. He would have just started working recently."

"I don't think so. This list is pretty up to date."

"But I'm sure this is where he works."

"Well," the man said suddenly, "that gentleman might know." He pointed at a man who had just gotten off an elevator, and shouted to him. "Mr. Green! Mr. Green!"

Mr. Green's head snapped around at the sound of his name, and he walked over to the desk. "Yes, John?"

"This lady could use some assistance."

He turned to Adele and shook her hand. "Martin Green, *New York World*. I'm an assistant editor here. May I help you?"

"Adele Weber, and yes, you can, Mr. Green. I'm looking for one of your other reporters, a Mr. Lucas Schmidt."

"Sorry, no one by that name works here." He paused, then, with a little too much eagerness in his voice, said, "Is there a story you'd like to share, Miss Weber? If it's good, we can get it into the evening edition."

"Um, no. Are you sure Mr. Schmidt doesn't work here?"

"Positive. I assign the stories to all the reporters. I know everyone who writes for us." He frowned. "Why? Is this fellow pretending to be a reporter for the *World*?"

"Um, no. I must have gotten the name of the paper wrong. I'll try the others. Good day, Mr. Green."

"Um, good day, Miss Weber," he said as Adele scurried away.

Granting the possibility that she had misunderstood, Adele spent the rest of the afternoon checking at every newspaper on Newspaper Row. Not to her surprise, she discovered that not a single paper knew of a reporter named Lucas Schmidt. The only newspaper she skipped over was the *Herald*, since after checking with every other major city paper, she didn't feel that a trip uptown to Thirty-Fourth Street was necessary.

Clearly, Mr. Schmidt had lied.

So if Mr. Schmidt didn't work for the *World*, or for any other newspaper, just what did he do during the day?

* * * *

The question possessed Adele, disrupting her sleep as much as her vivid dreams of fire and water. And so, on Tuesday, in the middle of the day so as to not to be discovered, Adele did the unthinkable. She went up to Mr. Schmidt's room and let herself in.

She had been in the room many times before, and at first glance the room looked as pristine as always. Schmidt clearly was fastidious when it came to keeping his personal space clean. The bed was neatly made, the wooden floor was swept, and the chair and table free of dust.

However, there was something different. A book lay on the table, one that Adele knew did not belong to either her or her mother, because it had a colorful dust jacket. She pulled out the chair, sat down, picked up the book, and studied the cover.

She had seen a few books bearing dust jackets, although those jackets had been simple plain white paper covers. She had never yet seen one as elaborate and expensive-looking as the dust jacket for this book. Her eyes were first drawn to the horrific illustration of the steamboat *General Slocum* that filled the bottom half of the cover. Searing red flames burned away at the right side of the boat, with lines of thick, black smoke hovering above. On the left side of the boat, people were jumping into the water. The picture appeared so vivid to her eyes that she could almost feel the rising flames getting hotter and hotter, the smoke smothering the victims—

She shuddered and focused her eyes on the title of the book. In large letters, the book blared out its title: SHIP ABLAZE. Underneath, the subtitle explained what the book was about: “The Tragedy of the Steamboat *General Slocum*.”

Finally, her eyes drifted to the smaller text above the title. She read: “On a beautiful spring morning in June 1904, 1,300 New Yorkers boarded the steamer *General Slocum* for a pleasant daylong excursion. But in thirty minutes, disaster would strike and more than one thousand would perish...”

Adele shuddered again, and her chest felt tight. She fought to keep her breath calm and even, while she tried to understand what she was reading.

She opened the book and noticed that the top of the inside jacket flap gave the price of the book: “US \$24.95 / Canada \$37.95.” Her jaw dropped. Twenty-four dollars and ninety-five cents for a *book*? Even good books cost no more than a dollar or two.

The inside front cover showed what looked like newspaper headlines, cartoons, and clippings. She ran her fingers over two of the headlines: “Negligence Doubled the Death List” and “‘Let Us Die!’ Cry Women at Morgue.” One of the cartoons, titled “Death’s Cruel Harvest,” showed the figure of Death holding a scythe and standing next to a field of fallen flowers with the heads of children. Another, “Death and Greed Partners,” showed a little girl lying on a table. On her left, a man in a coat and top hat counted his money, while on her right, a figure of Death, skull plainly visible and scythe in one hand, caressed the child’s forehead.

Adele felt cold and confused. What in the world was this?

She turned a few pages in and found a printed notice: “Copyright 2003 by EDWARD T. O’DONNELL.” The year made no sense to her. How could she be holding a book from almost one hundred years in the future? And who was this O’Donnell, an Irishman by the sound of his name, to write a book about a tragedy that befell a German community?

A small piece of paper fell out of the book and onto the table. Adele picked it up and examined it. It bore one line: “www.general-slocum.com.” She had no idea what it meant; “http” was clearly not a word, although she presumed she knew what the “general-slocum” part referred to.

It must be a joke, she thought. A cruel, elaborate hoax. But the book looked fine, much better than any other book she had ever seen. She started looking through the pages, faster and faster, trying to make sense of it all, when she heard the door open behind her. She quickly closed the book, placed it on the table, and stood up.

Schmidt saw her as soon as he entered. “Miss Weber! What are you doing in my room?”

Emotions of rage and embarrassment fought with each other, and rage won out.

“What am I doing here? What are *you* doing back here so early?”

"I had forgotten something in *my* room."

"Really? What exactly?"

He sighed. "I don't care for your tone, Miss Weber, nor do I care for your invasion of my privacy. I have to get back to work."

"Where? At the *New York World*?"

"Yes. Now please leave my room." He walked towards her, his eyes darting around.

Adele raised her hand in front of her, palm out. "You don't work at the *New York World*, Mr. Schmidt."

Schmidt stopped a few feet away. "How—what makes you say that?"

"I went looking for you there. They never heard of you. Nor had any other paper."

"What did you tell them?"

"Oh, nothing at all. It's not like I had found *this* yet." She picked up *Ship Ablaze*.

Schmidt sprang towards her. "Give that back to me. It's autographed."

"What?"

"I mean it's mine. Hand it over."

Adele pulled the book close to her body, and Schmidt hesitated. "Not without an explanation," she said. She waved the book around. "What is this?"

"Nothing you need to concern yourself with."

"Oh, really? It seems to be a book from the year 2003. Are you sure that it's not my concern that the current year is only 1904?"

"I—I don't know what to say."

"*Die Wahrheit wird euch frei machen*," Adele said.

"Pardon?"

"John, chapter eight, verse thirty-two. 'The truth shall make you free.' Tell me the truth."

"Um. The truth." He sighed. "I guess I ought to. That book is in fact from the year 2003. It's the definitive work on the *General Slocum* tragedy."

"The *General Slocum* tragedy," she repeated.

"Yeah. There were other books written before and after, but this one is still considered the most comprehensive."

She shook her head. "I don't understand. That is, I think I understand, but I don't want to."

"A normal reaction."

"Will you tell me what's going on? Who are you?" She brandished the book even higher. "How is this

possible?"

Schmidt crossed his arms. "Miss Weber, let me ask you something. Have you ever heard of an English writer, a man by the name of Herbert George Wells?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, one of the books he's written—at least, I think he's written it by now—has to do with the concept of time travel."

Adele searched her mind, and finally came up with a title. "*The Time Machine*."

Schmidt nodded. "Yes. *The Time Machine*. A man builds a machine that allows him to travel into the past and the future. I stand before you as the final achievement of that dream. In the future, we have figured out how to visit the past." He paused. "Do you believe me?"

"It seems an impossible fantasy," Adele said. "And yet—the book—"

"*The Time Machine*?" Schmidt asked.

Adele glared at him. "No. Your book. The one I'm holding. *Ship Ablaze*."

"Oh." Schmidt's eyes moved to look at the book. "That one."

"Yes. This one. I can't fathom how or why you might have arranged to have that book printed. The only conclusion I can come to is that the book is really from the twenty-first century." She paused. "Which means that you really have come here from the future."

He sighed, a world-weary sigh that seemed out of place in a man so young. "I'm not supposed to reveal that, but sometimes it's so hard to hide the truth." He walked over to his bed and sat down upon it. "I hope you won't betray my confidence."

"So tell me about this. Have you come back to stop this horrible tragedy? Is that why you're here?"

Schmidt paled, and he didn't reply.

"What is it?" Adele asked. "What's wrong?"

"I'm afraid," he said, "that I'm not here to stop the tragedy. I can't stop it. No one can. That's not how time travel works. There are restrictions."

"Then tell me how time travel works. Perhaps I can figure out a way to get around the restrictions."

Schmidt smiled. "How might you explain the workings of a telephone to someone in 1804?"

Adele raised a finger. "Do not patronize me, Mr. Schmidt. Perhaps I wouldn't be able to understand the science or technology behind time travel. But I do understand possibilities. If I knew that a ladder had a rotten rung, and that if someone who climbed it would break the rung and fall, I would be remiss if I didn't try to save them. Why can't you do the same?"

"Miss Weber, let me try to use your ladder analogy to make it clear. Imagine time as a sort of ladder. History happens when you climb the rungs. Okay?"

She nodded. "Okay."

"Now imagine what would happen if at a particular rung, I discovered that by fiddling with it I could cause a whole second ladder to emerge. So that I can create a choice of which ladder I climb."

"That's an odd image, but I'll accept it."

"It gets odder. Now imagine that I have some sort of switch on that rung. With the switch in its original position, I can climb up the original ladder. But if I flip the switch, the new ladder appears and the old one vanishes. And thus I can only climb the second ladder."

"Okay."

"But here's my point, Miss Weber. I already came down the first ladder. If I'm forced to climb the second ladder, I have no idea where I'll end up."

Adele pondered the image for a moment. "Let me see if I grasp your point clearly. You are saying that if you were to prevent this disaster, you would create a change in your own history."

"That's correct."

"I still do not see what is so wrong with that."

Schmidt sighed. "If I were to change the past, that would also force a change upon the future. And I *come* from the future, Miss Weber."

"I still don't see your objection."

"Let me summarize it by what is called the Grandfather Paradox. What would happen to me if I came back in time and killed my own grandfather while he was still a baby in his crib?"

"Ah," Adele said, with sudden understanding. "You would cease to exist. But then you wouldn't exist to kill your grandfather, so he should live."

Schmidt nodded. "Precisely. And if he lives, then I would be born, allowing me to go back in time and kill him. A paradox."

"So if you were to stop this horrible disaster, the future you came from would cease to exist, and by extension, so would you."

"Exactly. Again, a paradox."

"Well, how is this paradox resolved?"

He gave Adele a firm look. "By *not* changing the past."

"But then what happens to free will? Are you not here now, and able to make decisions?"

"Well, yes. But my decisions are not ones that will disrupt the future, so no problem emerges."

Adele shook her head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Schmidt, I can't accept that. If history is as fragile as you claim, then doesn't your presence here already disrupt the future?"

Schmidt bit his lip in thought. "Well, yes and no. Some changes are more important, more vital, than others. There's a Law of Conservation of Reality that sometimes kicks in."

"A Law of Conservation of Reality?"

Schmidt stared into the distance for a moment, then said, "Let me give you an example out of history that has already happened. Suppose you went back in time and killed Napoleon in his crib. What do you think would happen?"

Adele laughed. "Many things."

"Name one."

She shrugged. "The French would never have had their empire."

He nodded. "So you say. And yet, why was it Napoleon who was responsible for the empire? Weren't there other forces, other things, at play in history? Might not someone else have stepped in and taken on Napoleon's role?"

Adele thought for a moment, then said, "I am not much of a historian, Mr. Schmidt. I suppose it's possible, but these questions rarely come to my mind."

"Forgive me, Miss Weber. I am not trying to make you feel ignorant. Rather, I am trying to point out that while parts of history are fragile, other parts are much more resilient. If I were to kill Napoleon, the Law might cause some other Frenchman to form a similar empire, and by 1904 the broad outline of history would be back on track."

"So why not attempt to save my community? Isn't history resilient enough for that?"

He sighed. "History might be resilient enough, but I'm not."

"What do you mean?"

"That Law of Conservation of Reality I mentioned before? Sometimes the Law kicks in by killing the time traveler, so changes don't happen that have to be corrected. If I were to try to change history, history might try to kill me to prevent it."

She sniffed. "That seems to me a selfish reason not to help. Do not forget that my father gave his life to rescue others."

"And you lived to regret it, did you not? Or so you said at Coney Island."

Adele glared at him. "That was different."

Schmidt shrugged. "Perhaps. Miss Weber, please understand. From my point of view, all this—" he waved an arm around "—is already past. My presence here doesn't change it, as my own place is in your future. As far as I am concerned, the *General Slocum* tragedy is already a part of history."

Adele tapped her foot in annoyance. "So what's the point of your being here, Mr. Schmidt? If you're not planning to save my community, my friends, my family—me—then why are you here?"

Schmidt wrung his hands. "To save something. A remnant of memory. Have you heard of Thomas Alva Edison, the inventor?"

"Of course. Who hasn't?"

"Sorry. I'm still adjusting to what people might know in 1904. If you've heard of Edison, then you've probably heard of the motion picture."

She rolled her eyes. "Motion pictures such as *The Life of an American Fireman* or *The Great Train*

Robbery?"

Schmidt looked puzzled. "I've heard of the second, but not the first."

"I saw both last year at the Kinetoscope Parlor."

"The Kinetoscope Parlor?"

"On Broadway between Twenty-Sixth and Twenty-Seventh Street? It's been there since I was a child."

"I see. Well, then, this may be easier to explain than I thought. I've come back in time to make a record of the tragedy."

"You have your very own motion picture camera? You plan to preserve images of the disaster on film?"

"More than that," he said. "Much more." He stood up, walked over to his bureau, and opened the top drawer. From it he removed an odd-looking helmet with the word MEMVOX printed across the brow.

"Here," he said, handing it over.

Adele placed the book on the table. She took the helmet and turned it around in her hands, studying it. Many small metal disks were affixed to the inside.

"What do I do with this?"

"Place it over your head."

She laughed. "Are we about to engage in battle?"

He smiled. "Not unless you want to."

She carefully placed the helmet onto her head so as not to disturb her hair.

"How does that feel?" Schmidt asked, his voice sounding thick through the helmet.

"Heavy." She sniffed the air. "And it smells of oil."

"That will only last for a moment." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small molded metal box, with knobs and buttons, which he held near her head.

"Miss Weber, are you ready?"

"For what?"

Schmidt chuckled. "I guess I'd call it an immersion into another world. It's like watching a movie, but you experience it from the inside."

Adele shrugged. "It sounds intriguing. I'm ready."

Schmidt nodded. He pushed a button on the box—and suddenly the room vanished. Adele found herself strapped into a leather chair in a strange room. Dials and displays of numbers danced before her face. Directly ahead and to both sides, windows showed clear blue sky and clouds, with some sort of pavement underneath.

She felt a sudden jerk of movement, and a high-pitched whine filled her ears. The room she sat in started moving forward, faster and faster. The view through the window showed faraway buildings and trees,

moving past her more and more quickly, faster than she had ever gone before—and then suddenly the room lifted into the air.

Adele realized now that she had to be in some sort of vehicle, a flying machine. She now noticed some sort of pole, probably a steering mechanism, sticking out of the floor.

“Will wonders never cease?” she said aloud, although as far as she could tell there was no one around to hear her.

Very carefully, she took hold of the pole and pulled it towards her. The flying machine began to climb at an even steeper angle, and she felt herself pushed slightly into her seat. She pushed the pole forward and let it go, and the flying machine seemed to settle into a horizontal position.

“Hm,” she said.

She sat and looked out the window as the flying machine took her on a journey, sometimes ascending, sometimes descending. The experience was rather similar to that of being on a roller coaster, she decided, although a lot smoother.

Until the end.

Looking out the front window, she saw huge buildings of glass and metal, towering over the ground below. The machine brought her closer and closer to the buildings, when suddenly, just when she thought she would die in a crash, the machine banked upwards. She felt herself being pushed into her seat as the vehicle climbed. The weight of her body increased, making it harder for her to breathe. She waited for relief, but the vehicle just continued to accelerate, almost straight upwards—when suddenly it stalled, and she found herself, and the machine, falling.

She screamed as intense fear filled her entire being. The air seemed to get thicker and hotter. The urge to get away, to flee, to survive, overwhelmed her, and she suddenly remembered that this was all unreal. She tore the helmet from her head—and found herself back in Mr. Schmidt's chambers.

“Merciful God,” she croaked. Her heart beat so quickly she felt afraid it might burst out of her chest.

Schmidt immediately jumped to her side, and placed his hands upon her shoulders. Normally, she would have rejected the indignity, but she had no strength. “Miss Weber!” he said, his face a picture of concern. “Come, lie down upon the bed.”

Gently, she made her way from the chair to the bed, gripping Schmidt's arm firmly so she wouldn't fall onto the floor. The dizziness from the experience lingered. She collapsed onto the bed, breathing heavily, and she stifled an urge to vomit.

“Adele, I'm sorry. I truly am. I forgot how vivid virtual reality can be. I didn't realize the effect that would have on you. I suppose it's as removed from motion pictures as—as I am from 1904.”

“What—what in the name of our Lord was that?”

“It's called—well, it doesn't matter what it's called. The point is that you were flying.”

She glared at him. “I know I was flying, you idiot. Or at least it felt like it. Was that real?”

He nodded. “Oh, yes. Quite real.”

“I still want to know what it was called.”

"The flying machine is called an airplane."

"An airplane," Adele repeated, as she got her breath back. "And it hasn't been invented yet. That I know for a fact."

Schmidt cleared his throat. "Actually, two brothers flew one just last December, if I remember my history."

"Last December?"

"Yes."

She shook her head. "Impossible. I would have known."

Schmidt shrugged. "Well, it's not as important as the device you just had on your head. It's called a memory player."

"A memory player," she echoed.

"Yes. It can replay the memories of one person into another person's mind."

"So that was a memory? Of someone flying an airplane?"

"Well, not quite. That was more of a training scenario. If it had been a real memory, you wouldn't have been able to interact with it."

Adele took a moment to assimilate this information, then said, "It's more intense than watching a movie, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," Schmidt replied. "But I guess you learned that already."

Adele feared she knew the answer to the next question, but felt compelled to ask it anyway. "How does this device tie in with the St. Mark's excursion?"

"Well," Mr. Schmidt said. He looked around the room, never looking at Adele's face.

"Well," he said again.

"I'm waiting," Adele said.

"I'm implanting memory recorder nanobots into the minds of as many people in Little Germany as I can. Especially the women and children, as they will be the majority of the people on the steamboat."

"What was that word?"

"Um." Schmidt ran his hand through his hair, as if searching for his thoughts. "You mean nanobots?"

"Yes."

"That's a little hard to explain. It's like the lens of the camera. It would be as if the film of the camera were kept in a separate container." He lifted the little box again. "All the memories will end up in here, and then I can bring them with me back to the future."

"But how can the memories reach from people's minds into your little box?"

"Um," Schmidt said again. "That's hard to explain. I'd have to use a lot of scientific terminology that

hasn't been invented yet. Could you explain to a medieval monk how a motion picture works?"

"Do not talk to me as if I were a small child," she said coldly. "I have a mind, you know." As the words came out of her mouth, a sudden, chilling thought occurred to her. "Mr. Schmidt. Did you implant one of those—those nanobots in *my* head?"

"Yours was one of the first," he replied.

She glared at him. "That is a severe invasion of my privacy. You are the absolute worst sort of voyeur."

"I would beg your pardon, Miss Weber, but that would be dishonest of me. You have to remember that from my perspective, all the members of this community are long gone. Where I come from, you're already a vic—I mean, you've already passed on." He paused. "Besides, the other side to this invasion of your privacy is the historical record. I would imagine that your people would want a record of the tragedy."

She picked the book off of the table again. "Isn't this proof that there will be a record?"

"Sort of. May I show you something?" Gently, he took the book from her hands. He flipped through the pages until he found a page close to the end of the book, and he handed the book back to her. "Read this," he said.

The page displayed three simple words on two lines: "Part Four" in smaller type, with the word "Forgetting" underneath in larger type. A picture of the steamboat's wheel appeared underneath.

Adele looked up. "Forgetting?" she asked.

"The tragedy is not remembered."

"At all?"

He cleared his throat. "It is remembered a bit, but not as much as other tragedies, some with fewer lives lost, but also ones with much, much more devastation."

"More devastation?" Adele couldn't fathom such a thing. She closed the book and checked the number on the front cover. "More than the one thousand the book claims perished?"

"One thousand twenty-one," Schmidt said.

"You didn't answer my question."

Schmidt got a far away look in his eyes. "The answer is yes. There are other disasters, much worse, in this city's history."

"Worse?"

He nodded, and gestured with his hands as if trying to create a picture for her. "Buildings set aflame. People jumping out of windows. Great unimaginable towers crashing down. Diseases running rampant in the streets." He shuddered.

"Do you have any of those in your memory player?"

He nodded. "As regular recordings, yes. I have a few."

"I see." She paused. "Do not show me any of those. Ever."

"I would never inflict those images on anyone who didn't need to see them," he replied.

Adele glanced at the book. "Even with other disasters, how could people forget this one?"

"That's hard to explain without going into more detail about the future, but let me see." He paused in thought for a moment. "Many years ago—or many years in the future, from your perspective—when I was a student, I took a course in history at Columbia University from Professor James Patrick Shenton. He taught me two truisms about this city. The first was that New Yorkers never let principle take precedence over profit."

"And the second?"

"New Yorkers also never let memory be a hindrance."

"Explain," Adele said.

"New Yorkers have never been much for preserving the past. If a building stood in the way of progress, no matter how historic, it would be torn down."

"People's lives are not buildings, Mr. Schmidt."

"True," he replied. "But to some people those lives are valued even less." He lifted the book. "It's all in here. The *Slocum* disaster was the greatest tragedy this city had ever known, and within one hundred years, it had been completely forgotten. I want people to remember again. I want them to know the tragedy that struck."

"But it hasn't happened yet," Adele said. "Why force them to know the tragedy? Why not erase it before it ever comes to pass?"

"I've already told you. The timeline is not that resilient."

"Surely it would be resilient enough to spare the lives of my thousand countrymen! After all, if the disaster is mostly forgotten, how could preventing it possibly affect history?"

"It would affect my personal history, Miss Weber. There are ancestors of mine who will die on the *General Slocum*."

Adele had not expected that. "Really? Who? Do I know them?"

Schmidt shook his head. "I've said too much already. But it's because of my family history that I'm one of the people who remember the tragedy."

"I see. I'm sorry." Even as she spoke the words, Adele felt the absurdity of consoling Mr. Schmidt on the deaths of ancestors who hadn't even died yet. Nevertheless, it seemed to her the proper thing to say.

"Thank you," he said.

"Mr. Schmidt, why did you tell me all this?"

"You—you discovered the book. I had no choice."

She smiled at him. "Do not take me for a fool. If, as you say, there are inherent dangers in changing history, surely your showing me something of the future is a danger."

He nodded. "It is. But fortunately I can correct that."

Adele felt a chill run through her body, and it took her a moment to regain the ability to speak. "Does that mean—would you—are you planning to murder me?"

Schmidt's eyebrows shot up and his jaw dropped open. The expression on his face was so comical that Adele almost laughed. "I take it the answer is no."

"I'm surprised you would have even entertained the notion," he said.

"You're letting a thousand people go to their deaths without interference. It wasn't that much of a stretch."

He sighed. "No, I suppose not. But I don't have to kill you. I can use another one of my devices to make you forget our conversation ever happened."

She nodded. "Ah. So you would further violate my mind, then."

"I have no real choice," Schmidt said. From a jacket pocket he pulled out a thin metal rod. "This device is called a disorienter. It will cause you to forget our conversation. Are you ready?"

"I plead with you. Do not do this."

"I have no choice, Miss Weber. I'm sorry."

He pointed the rod directly at her and pushed a button. Adele considered jumping away, or lunging for the rod, but neither option seemed viable. Instead, she shut her eyes tight and waited for whatever effect the rod would have on her.

But nothing happened. She opened one eye and saw Mr. Schmidt standing there, dumbfounded, the rod now hanging loosely from his hand.

"Mr. Schmidt? I still remember everything."

He nodded. "I know. I couldn't do it."

Adele felt a small measure of relief. "Ah. I knew you wouldn't do that to me."

Schmidt shook his head. "No, Adele. What I meant was that your mind is too strong. There are always some people whose minds resist the disorienter. I'm afraid you're one of them."

"Oh. I had thought—never mind. So what happens now?"

"Now?" He paused, his brow furrowed. "Now I guess I have to rely upon your discretion."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning it is my turn to plead with you. Miss Weber, promise me that you will not breathe a word of this to anyone. The consequences will be disastrous if you do."

She pointed at *Ship Ablaze*. "They will be disastrous if I don't."

"Miss Weber—"

Adele stood up and took a few quick steps over to the door. Just before she left the room, she took one last look at the book. "You have kept your own counsel for quite some time, Mr. Schmidt. Expect me to do the same."

* * * *

On many of the following nights, Adele Weber dreamed again of fire and water. But no longer did she float on a simple raft that was sometimes a building or a maze. Instead, she found herself on a cavernous steamboat, devoid of other people, as a fire licked away at the decks.

During the days, Lucas Schmidt kept up the pretense of going to work at the *World*. Adele knew the truth, but saw no reason to tell her mother. Schmidt somehow managed to pay his weekly rent, so what would be the point of exposing him? It wasn't as if her mother could do anything.

But there were some people who could. A few evenings later, Adele stood in front of Mr. Schmidt's door with Reverend Haas and Mary Abendschein. Haas knocked on the door, and within a moment Schmidt opened it.

"Pastor Haas. Miss Abendschein." The slightest pause. "Miss Weber. To what do I owe this visit?"

"May I speak with you, Mr. Schmidt?" Haas asked.

"Um—certainly." He moved aside and allowed the pastor and the head of the excursion committee into his room. As Adele passed by, she gave him a haughty look, to which Schmidt did not visibly react. She darted over to his desk, but nothing sat upon it.

"Well, where is it?" she asked as Haas and Abendschein found places to stand.

"Where is *what*, Miss Weber?" Haas asked.

"*He* knows," she said, pointing at Schmidt.

"I do?" Schmidt asked.

She glared at him. "The book. The memory recorder. The helmet. Any of it. All of it."

Haas removed his spectacles. "Miss Weber. Miss Abendschein and I were willing to come talk to Mr. Schmidt, but would you mind if I handled this my way?"

"Sorry, Reverend. By all means."

Haas nodded. "Mr. Schmidt. Adele has come to us with news of a premonition, for lack of a better word."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Now I have known Adele and her family for a long time; in fact, I christened Adele. And I know that Adele sometimes has vivid dreams regarding what may come to pass."

"Oh, does she?" Schmidt asked.

"Yes, she does. I tend not to put faith in such things myself. But once or twice—" He paused. "But that is not important now. *This* is."

"What?"

Haas put his spectacles back on. "Mr. Schmidt, this will sound ludicrous, but Miss Weber told me that you knew of a problem with the upcoming excursion to Long Island."

"Really?"

“Yes. She said that it came to her in a dream. She claimed you had in your possession a book that detailed a great disaster that would take place should we go on our excursion.”

Schmidt looked at Adele, who let her gaze fall to the floor. “Indeed,” he said.

“I know it sounds like nonsense, but she seemed most insistent.”

“Well, I have no such book. This sounds like a dream of hers that had best stay in the dark of night.”

Haas pulled at his collar and then wiped his brow with a white handkerchief. “May I have your permission to look around?”

Schmidt smiled. “This is my private room, Reverend Haas, but I wouldn't be here if not for you. Please, by all means. I shall be outside, breathing in the fresh night air.”

Given the trace scent of manure that occasionally wafted through the streets, it was clear to Adele that Schmidt was being facetious, and merely giving them a chance to search his room without his presence. It also became clear to her that Reverend Haas would not be able to find the book; otherwise, Mr. Schmidt would not have been so ready to assent.

“Never mind,” she said suddenly. “There's nothing here.”

Haas looked at her. “Were you lying then about your dream?”

“No, Reverend. I would never lie to you. I am convinced Mr. Schmidt knows of a danger which he simply refuses to tell us. But I don't think we're going to find anything that I saw—I mean that I dreamed about—here.”

Haas nodded, and turned back to Schmidt. “Mr. Schmidt—Lucas—on your honor as a new member of my congregation, please be candid. Is there any reason that you know of that we should cancel the festivities of Wednesday next?”

Schmidt glanced at Adele and Haas in turn. Finally, he gave a weary shake of his head. “I know of no reason.”

“Thank you, sir.” Haas turned to Adele and flashed a weak smile. “Adele, I know how caught up you sometimes get in your dreams. Please rest assured that I will take all precautions to ensure a smooth and safe excursion on the *General Slocum*.”

“Will you speak with the captain, at least? Have him run a fire drill?”

Haas sighed. “Captain Van Schiack has been in charge of the steamboat for thirteen years, and he has a spotless record. I am sure we will be fine.”

Haas and Abendschein departed. As soon as the door closed behind them, Adele lurched at Schmidt, who jumped back. “Where is it, you cad?”

“The book?”

“Yes, the book! What have you done with it, you blackguard?”

“I sent it back to the future.”

“You did what?”

"I had to. I couldn't risk the possibility that someone else might come across it. No one would believe *you*, not with your reputation for dreams. But they might believe the book. And if someone else were to see it, well, I'm not sure if people would be so mistrusting of Reverend Haas or Miss Abendschein."

"But all these people are going to die!"

"History can't be helped."

Adele thought of a few choice responses to that, but considered herself far too much of a lady to say them aloud. Instead, she replied, "You are wrong. History can be helped, especially if it is not yet history."

He raised a finger. "Adele—"

"Do not presume upon me, Mr. Schmidt."

"Let me try to show you the dangers in another way. Forget the *General Slocum* for the moment. Instead, answer this question: would you have me go back further into time and save your father's life?"

Adele froze. "That possibility had never occurred to me."

"Well?"

"Go back in time and save my father from dying? Of course I would."

"Are you sure? Think long and hard before answering again."

Adele thought. She had loved her father so much when she was a little girl. He had always hugged her every evening when he came home from work, and she remembered how happy he always made her just by being around. He used to take Adele and her mother to the park and playgrounds, and she remembered how safe she always felt, knowing her father was around.

And yet ... Her father had also been an overwhelming presence in her family. Adele loved to read anything she could get her hands on, and she had had to sneak glances at books and magazines while her father was alive. For some reason, he never felt that a little girl needed to read so much, even though Adele thirsted to learn about the world. As much as she didn't want to admit it, her father's absence had made it easier for her in some ways.

In fact ... Adele thought about how necessity had forced her mother to grow from a simple housewife into a woman who managed to keep the two of them in food and shelter. The fact was that her mother had become a much stronger, more independent woman than she had been before. Adele wouldn't want to take that away from her mother.

"Well?" Schmidt asked. "Would you change history?"

"I—I don't know. The woman I am now would probably say yes, and ask you to go back in time and save my father. But if I did allow it to happen, then the woman I am now would cease to exist. And I have no idea what my new life would be like."

"Precisely. Perhaps if your father lived, your mother would have died. Or maybe you yourself. Or perhaps you all would have ended up a happy family, right until the *Slocum* disaster. That's just it. You don't know, you can't know. History is dangerous to toy with."

"However, Mr. Schmidt, your analogy has one fatal flaw."

“Which is what?”

She took a deep breath. “If you ask me here in 1904 if I would go back in time to 1898 to change something, I hesitate. But if you ask me to prevent something that, as far as I am concerned, has not yet happened, my answer is an unequivocal yes.” She paused. “I shall continue spread the word about the disaster, Mr. Schmidt. And you can't stop me.”

“You already saw Reverend Haas's reaction. They'll consider you insane if you try.”

“And I will consider myself evil if I do not.”

Schmidt flinched. “Do not think of me as evil, Miss Weber. As I said, there are far worse tragedies in history. If we were to prevent one tragedy from occurring, morally we would have to prevent them all ... and the universe would fall apart in a blaze of otherworldly fire.”

“*Ein Prophet gilt nirgends weniger als in seinem Vaterland und bei seinen Verwandten und in seinem Hause,*” she said.

“Huh?”

“Oh, I'm sorry,” she said with a sarcastic tone. “Once again, I had forgotten that you don't speak German. Mark, chapter six, verse four. ‘A prophet is not without honor save in his own country.’”

“You are not a prophet, Miss Weber.”

“And you are not a gentleman, Mr. Schmidt. You have shown me the future and have denied me the means of averting it. Good night. I hope you have nightmares.”

* * * *

The week of the excursion finally came. The Monday before, June 13, was the day of the annual parade of the *Schuetzen Bund*, a German-American shooting club, and Adele went to watch the parade with her mother, despite feeling glum. At the front of the parade marched a group of men on horses, blowing trumpets, along with men playing kettledrums. Everyone was dressed in traditional costume, from their Bavarian hats down to their lederhosen. Women wore dirndls over their blouses and long flowing skirts, with their hair braided in myriad styles. And then, following behind, thousands of German immigrants and German-Americans, many brandishing rifles.

Adele searched the crowd for Mr. Schmidt, but couldn't find him. He had chosen not to watch the parade with them, and when she pressed him, he explained that this would be his last chance to spread his nanobots before the excursion. Adele's mother took it as a rejection of Adele, which made Adele even more listless.

Adele slept badly on both Monday and Tuesday nights. And then the morning of Wednesday, June 15, 1904, arrived. Adele awoke to sunlight streaming in the windows. She breathed in the morning air and felt a breeze caress her body. The day would clearly turn out to be beautiful; she just hoped it wouldn't be tragic as well.

After she dressed, she knocked on Mr. Schmidt's door, but there was no response.

“Mr. Schmidt?” she called out. “You don't want to miss the boat.”

Again, impudence won out over propriety. Adele turned the knob, opened the door, and walked into the room, only to discover that it was completely empty of Schmidt and his possessions. All of his clothing was gone, as were his futuristic devices.

After a few minutes, she sighed and went to the kitchen to prepare breakfast and lunch for herself and her mother. When her mother finally came into the dining room, she was already dressed for the excursion in her finest Sunday outfit, a blue blouse and skirt combination topped off with a broad-brimmed hat.

"What do you think, Adele?" she asked, turning around.

"You look lovely as always, mother."

"Will you be wearing a hat, Adele? If you don't, you'll catch your death of sunburn."

"I thought I would bring a parasol. I've left it near the door with the blankets and towels."

Adele's mother nodded. "Thank you for preparing the sandwiches."

"Of course." She paused. "Mother, will Mr. Schmidt be joining us? I didn't hear him in his room."

"I spoke with him last night. He told me that he would be leaving early for the boat." She flashed a knowing smile at Adele. "My guess is that he wishes to save two seats on the hurricane deck."

Despite her sour mood, Adele couldn't help but smile back. "You harbor more hopes than I do."

"Now, child, I'm sure he will forgive you for your fantasies. I wouldn't be surprised if he's planned something special for you once we reach Locust Grove."

"Or even before," Adele said under her breath.

"What?"

"Nothing." Adele thought for a moment about whether she should tell her mother that Mr. Schmidt had cleared his room of all his possessions. She decided not to. But she did decide one last time to express her reservations about the excursion.

"Mother, I'm still not sure if we should go on the steamboat."

"This again?" She sighed. "Adele, you've already been fodder for the church gossip mill. Please stop."

"But mother—"

"Adele, I'm going, whether you do or not. Your uncle is expecting me. And we need to leave now. The *General Slocum* is scheduled to depart from the East Third Street recreation pier at a quarter to nine."

Adele felt torn, but she wasn't about to let her mother go on the steamboat without her. At the very least, perhaps she could save the two of them.

They stepped out onto the street, which already teemed with hundreds of people dressed in their Sunday best heading towards the Third Street pier. Some walked briskly east, while others hovered in front of tenement buildings or stood at corners, waiting for friends and family.

They stopped once when Adele heard a little girl laughing behind them. She turned around and spotted Catherine Gallagher with her family.

"Well, hello, Catherine. You seem particularly happy."

"I am, I am!" the little girl shouted. "I thought I wasn't going to be able to go, but the woman at the store,

she gave me a ticket!" She held her ticket up high.

"Now be careful, Catherine," the girl's mother said. "You don't want to lose the ticket, now that God has smiled upon you."

More like God has sentenced you, Adele thought.

"Have a good time," Adele's mother said to the Gallaghers. "We'll see you on the boat."

Soon enough, Adele and her mother found themselves at the gangplank, where Reverend Haas and Mary Abendschein stood welcoming parishioners and guests onto the *General Slocum*. "Ah, Miss Weber, Mrs. Weber," Haas said. "I am delighted to see you both. Particularly *you*, Miss Weber."

"Here, dears," Miss Abendschein said, pressing into their left hands copies of the *Journal for the Seventeenth Annual Excursion of St. Mark's Evan. Lutheran Church*.

"The program feels thicker than last year's," Adele's mother said.

Abendschein preened. "We managed to get over one hundred advertisements this year."

Adele flipped through the program. "A remarkable achievement."

"Thank you, Adele." She looked around. "I certainly hope you weren't too upset with how often I kept your boarder away from home."

"Miss Abendschein! Really!"

She laughed. "Relax. Your mother told me that he seemed to be courting you. I wouldn't stand in the way."

"Have you actually seen Mr. Schmidt today?" Adele asked.

"I thought I saw him boarding earlier," Reverend Haas replied. He looked directly at Adele. "I imagine he's looking forward to a day in the country as much as the rest of us."

Adele grasped the unspoken point, that Schmidt would not have boarded the *Slocum* if Adele's suspicions of disaster had any grounding to them. "Thank you, Reverend Haas."

"I'll see you on the boat."

Adele and her mother crossed the gangplank and boarded the *General Slocum*, along with many happy, laughing people. Adele noticed a deckhand clicking away on a mechanical counter as people stepped off the gangplank and onto the boat. She repressed the urge to tell him to be extra careful with his count.

"Well, dear," her mother said, "shall we go to the afterdeck?"

"I want to stay here and keep an eye out for Mr. Schmidt."

"He's probably already on board," her mother replied. "I want to go listen to Professor George Maurer and his band. Your uncle said he would save us some seats. But you can stay out on the main deck, if you wish."

Adele sighed. "Mother, I really do not wish to be separated."

Her mother laughed. "Child! Really. Nothing's going to happen. Okay?"

"Okay," Adele said without enthusiasm.

"Good. I'm going to the afterdeck to hear the music. You may stay here if you wish."

"I think I will, at least for the moment."

Adele waved farewell to her mother and watched the gangplank as more people came onto the boat. Although the boat was scheduled to depart at 8:45 AM, various passengers asked Reverend Haas to hold the boat for one more family member or friend, and Haas agreed. It wasn't until almost 9:45 AM, as a young girl and her brother flew down the pier, that the deckhands finally got ready to haul up the gangplank.

As Adele watched this, still straining her eyes for some sign of Mr. Schmidt, she spotted the wife of Philip Straub and her three children. An impulse made her approach them.

"Mrs. Straub."

"Adele Weber! How are you?"

"Mrs. Straub, you've always been so nice to me, I feel I must warn you." Adele paused for a moment, then said, "I've been having dreams, dark dreams of today's excursion."

Mrs. Straub's face turned pale. "So I'm not the only one," she whispered.

Adele watched as Mrs. Straub turned to a man next to her and said something. Immediately, that man grabbed his wife and five children and ran towards the gangplank. Right behind him, Straub and her three children followed. They tumbled off the boat and landed on the pier, gasping for breath.

Praise to the heavens, thought Adele. At least I've managed to save someone.

The gangplank disappeared, the crew began to cast off, shouts went up to the pilothouse, and the twin paddle wheels began to turn.

The *General Slocum* was underway.

* * * *

For the next few minutes, Adele wandered the decks, looking for some sign of either Mr. Schmidt or a way off the steamboat. Children of all ages ran around, playing various games. She spotted Lillie Pfeifer, a friend who was but a year older and yet already married. Lillie and she had spent many previous excursions dancing with other teenagers on the boat, but Adele knew that things would be different today, as Lillie had to spend the day in the company of other married ladies, no matter their age. In truth, Adele felt relieved that she didn't have to fawn over Lillie and be excited for her new marriage.

Adele turned a corner to keep Lillie from spotting her, and found herself face to face with Mr. Schmidt. His shocked expression showed that he was just as surprised to see her as she was to see him. "Mr. Schmidt? What are you doing here? I thought you would be long gone by now."

"I should ask you the same question, Miss Weber. What are you doing here, knowing what you know?"

"My mother refused to heed my warnings, and I would not let her come on the excursion alone. I am hoping to save her."

"Ah." He looked down at his feet.

"Nor could I let the rest of my community go into this tragedy alone. Perhaps I could help them. What

about you?" She frowned. "Didn't you plant all the recorders you needed?" she asked with coldness in her voice. "Isn't it time you went back to where you came from?"

"That's just it, Miss Weber. I'm not sure if I can."

"Oh? And why not?"

A few women bumped into Schmidt as they came around the corner. After a few hurried words of "Pardon me" and "Excuse me," Schmidt pulled Adele over to the railing. He leaned forward and whispered in her ear.

"I stopped the disaster."

Adele felt a lump in her throat. "What do you mean?"

"I went to the lamp room well before the fire would have started. I found a lit cigarette sitting on the floor, and I stamped it out."

"The lamp room?"

Schmidt gave her a curious look. "Just how much of the book did you manage to read?"

"Not that much."

He nodded. "Well, the fire started in the lamp room, just below the main deck. That is, it would have started there. But I put it out."

"You're not lying?"

The glum look on his face said it all. "No, I'm not. Otherwise, I wouldn't be on the boat. I'd have stayed safely away."

"What about all that warning about changing the future?"

Schmidt leaned back on the railing, and looked around. Adele followed his gaze. In one corner, a group of older women were deeply engaged in conversation. In another, a few children were playing a game of hide-and-seek.

Schmidt's eyes stopped wandering, and he looked back at Adele. "I got to know everyone," he said.

"Pardon?"

"The German-Americans of the Lower East Side. It may be a shrinking community, but it's still a vibrant one, full of life and joy. I couldn't bear to see it destroyed the way it once was."

Slowly, Adele nodded. "You came to see the world through my eyes, then."

Schmidt took a deep breath and exhaled it. "Sadly, yes. I decided it would be best if the future didn't have a tragedy to remember."

"Sadly, you say?"

"I'll get in trouble if the future finds out."

"But you changed the future."

“Not enough, apparently. I'm still here, which means my future still exists, in some form or other. That means I'll have to take responsibility for changing history.” He paused. “But it's worth it all, just to see you happy.”

Adele moved closer to Mr. Schmidt. She knew it would appear unseemly, but she could only think of one way to express her gratitude—when suddenly, she noticed a new odor mixing with that of the salt water and sea air. An odor of burning wood.

“Lucas?” she asked, sniffing the air.

Schmidt's eyes widened with horror. “I smell it too.”

A young boy ran past, shouting, “The boat is on fire, the boat is on fire!”

Schmidt tugged on his watch fob, brought his pocket watch up to his face, opened the case, and glanced at the time. “I'm too late.”

“What is it?”

“It's the fire. I couldn't stop it. The Law of Conservation of Reality kicked in.”

“What are you saying?”

“History doesn't record exactly what started the fire. I thought it was the cigarette, but it could have been a smoldering match.” He hit the railing in frustration. “Damn. I should have stayed down there, not let anyone near the lamp room.”

“If the fire is starting, we must get to safety.”

“Yes, but—”

A man ran past them, shouting, “Quick! Grab a life preserver! Get to the boats!”

A crowd of people began running towards the boats. Adele tried to join them, but Schmidt gripped her arm tightly. “No. It won't do us any good.”

“Why not?”

“The cork in the life preservers has become cork dust. If you jumped overboard wearing one, you would sink like a stone.”

“What about the lifeboats?”

“Held down with wire,” Schmidt responded. “They'll never get one loose in time.”

“You knew all this?”

“Yes, I did.” He paused. “It's part of history.”

She glared. “It was all in that book, wasn't it?”

He nodded. “Yes, it was.”

“*Mein Gott!* My mother! I must find my mother!” She tried to pull her arm out of Schmidt's grip, but failed. “Let me go!”

“No, Adele. It's too dangerous. You'll find yourself rushing into a wall of flame.”

Tears began to come to her eyes, as passengers jostled around them, running towards the lifeboats. “You must let me go save my mother!”

Schmidt grabbed her other arm and swung her around. “Adele, listen to me! We can't save everyone. It's too late. History must play itself out. But we can save ourselves, and your mother as well, if you will calm down and follow my instructions.”

Adele nodded. “What do we do?”

“I'm a time traveler. I can take us out of phase with the timeline. Then I can leave you suspended outside of time while I go search for your mother.”

“You intend to leave me in safety while you risk yourself to find my mother?”

“Using my time machine is the only way I can attempt to save both of you.”

Adele took a deep breath. “Swear to the Lord that you are not lying to me.”

“Adele, I swear to the heavens above that I am not lying. May I use my time machine to save us?”

“Do it.”

Schmidt unbuttoned his jacket. Underneath he wore an odd belt with metal buttons. He took Adele's hand in his and wrapped it around his belt, making sure she had a firm grip.

“The belt is your time machine?” she asked.

“Yes. Now hold on.”

He pushed a button, and the world around them seemed to fade into nonexistence.

* * * *

Panic embraced the hearts and souls of the women, children, and men on board the *General Slocum*. Some people ran to find their children. Others ran for the life preservers; the few who managed to put them on and jump into the water drowned almost immediately.

People died in fire. People died in water.

And Adele Weber, floating outside of time like an insubstantial ghost, had a front-row seat for the entire disaster.

She watched as a man started swimming towards land. Three or four women—she couldn't tell because of the way they flailed about in the water—grabbed at the man, desperate for some way to stay afloat. He screamed at them and tried to push them away, but it was no use. The women grabbed onto the man, and without meaning to, dragged him under the water.

She watched as Captain Van Schiack ordered his pilot, Van Wart, to beach the wooden steamboat on North Brother Island—a full mile away, nowhere near as close as the Bronx docks or the Queens shore.

She watched as fire and smoke flew from the front of the vessel to the stern, filling the decks. The flame swept higher and higher, devouring the boat like an insatiable monster. Sparks and embers jumped onto people, who screamed as the air filled with the sickening odor of their burning, shriveling flesh.

She watched as strangers picked up children that were not their own and threw them overboard. The children shouted for their parents as they fell into the darkness of the cold water, most never to emerge.

She watched as George Heins, only one year younger than Adele, ran to grab a small girl, but was too late as she disappeared into a sudden wall of flame.

She watched as people crushed each other against the rails, forcing others overboard, where they quickly drowned.

She watched as Lucas Schmidt dove into and out of time, trying to locate and rescue her mother.

She watched until she could not bear to watch anymore, but her eyes refused to close, until finally, the steamboat, engulfed with fire, had made it to North Brother Island.

And then she lost consciousness.

* * * *

Adele awoke on a bed in a strange room, with Schmidt sitting in a chair next to her.

"Lucas?" she called out. "Where am I?"

"I brought you to a hotel to recuperate. You've been in and out of a coma. It's an aftereffect of being outside of time for so long without a time belt to keep your quantum structure stable."

"How long have I been unconscious?"

"About two days."

She pushed herself up out of the bed. "Days?"

"It's Friday. Mid-morning." He pointed at a stack of newspapers. "I've brought you the news, if you want to know what's been going on."

"Perhaps I should just read *Ship Ablaze*," she said sarcastically.

Schmidt shrugged. "I may have changed history. The book might not be as accurate as it had been. And anyway, I don't have it here in 1904 anymore."

Adele picked up the newspapers and began rustling through them. The headlines spoke of nothing but the disaster. "499 Known To Be Dead" reported the *Herald*. "Horror in East River!" from the *Tribune*. At least Pulitzer's *World* had found something good to report: "Many Gallant Rescues of the Drowning!"

"They're reporting anywhere from five hundred to one thousand dead," Adele said.

"That always happens after a tragedy such as this one," Schmidt replied. "It'll take a while for the numbers to settle down."

"One thousand twenty-one," Adele said. "From the inside front cover of your book."

"Um, yes. Again, though, you're assuming that I didn't change history, even though I tried."

Adele thought of the Straub family she had saved, but said nothing about them. Instead, she said, "You didn't change history, Mr. Schmidt. If you had, you wouldn't be here anymore."

He sighed. "You're probably right. But I won't know for sure until I return to the future."

“When—when do you leave?”

“Not for a day or two more, at least. I’ve got to make sure all my recordings are set.”

“Hm,” Adele said, and returned to perusing the paper. After a moment, she found something that made her gasp loudly.

“What is it?” Schmidt asked.

She pointed at the article. “It says here that they’ve set up a makeshift morgue at the Charities Pier on East Twenty-Sixth Street.”

Schmidt leaned over and took a look at it. “Yes, they have.”

“Did you—where is my mother?”

A dark cloud seemed to pass over Schmidt's face. He cleared his throat and said, “I’m sorry, Adele. I was too late.”

Adele felt a lump in her throat. She held back her tears and said, “I see.”

“The fire was everywhere. I couldn't even find her.” He paused. “But I tried, Adele. I did try. Please believe me.”

She pushed the pile of newspapers to the floor. “I need to go to the morgue,” she said. “I need to find my mother.”

“You can't,” Schmidt said.

“I can and I will!”

He hesitated, then nodded. “All right. But let me go with you. She may not even be there. And even if she is, you may not like what you find.”

“You wish to come with me?”

“Yes, I do.” He paused. “You've already been through a lot; I want to make sure you're all right.”

Adele studied the earnest expression on Schmidt's face, and then nodded. “Very well. Let us go immediately.”

They left the room and descended the stairs to the hotel lobby. Schmidt tipped a doorman, who called for a horse and carriage. “Mr. Schmidt, I thought we would take a public conveyance.”

“This is more private.”

“Also more expensive.”

He shrugged. “I have resources. Please let me assist you as I can.”

Adele nodded. “Thank you.”

“You're welcome.” Schmidt held the carriage door for her, and the two of them rode to the pier.

* * * *

Adele and Schmidt descended the carriage at the end of the street. As Schmidt paid the driver, Adele

took in the sight. Huge crowds of people, mostly men, wandered all over the pier, speaking in hushed, quiet tones. Many carried photographs of their loved ones, pressing them onto other people in the crowd and asking if anyone had seen them. Policemen were scattered about the crowd, but some were patrolling right where the carriage dropped them off.

“Sir, madam, may we ask your business here?” one of the policemen asked with a harsh tone in his voice.

“We were on the boat,” Schmidt said. “We're hoping to find this lady's mother.”

“Oh.” He moved to let them by. “Sorry, sir, but we thought you might be more curiosity seekers.”

“What?” Adele asked. “Did I hear you right?”

The policeman nodded. “It's disgusting, isn't it? A lot of them came here Wednesday night and Thursday. For the excitement of being here.”

“Fire and Flames,” Adele said under her breath.

“What, miss?”

“Nothing.”

As they walked into the crowd, Adele's gaze shifted from left to right. When they got to the smaller crowd in front of the covered pier, she whispered, “It seems so calm.”

One of the men waiting there responded. “There was a riot yesterday,” he said. “Shortly after Mayor McClellan left. But the police got it under control.”

“Oh,” Adele said, not sure what to say. “You were here yesterday?”

The man nodded. “My wife and children weren't in the morgue yesterday. I know they've got to be alive somewhere. I just know it. I'm hoping someone here might have some information.”

Another man joined the conversation. “Things were really bad yesterday. Some people tried to jump in the river when they found the bodies of their loved ones.”

“Oh,” Adele said. “I hope—that is—I'm sorry.”

The man nodded. “Thank you. I'm sorry for whatever loss you've suffered as well.” He paused. “I've found some of my family, but not all. I'm hoping to find the rest today so we can bury them all together.”

“Conrad Muth,” said a morgue attendant at the entrance.

“That's me,” the man said.

“Come with me, please.”

Adele moved forward before the attendant and Mr. Muth could move away. “Excuse me, please. I'd like to check in.”

“What's your name, Miss?”

“Adele Weber. I'm looking for my mother, Mathilde.”

The attendant made a note on a piece of paper. “Okay, Miss Weber, we'll call you when we're ready for

you.” He paused. “I don't want to raise your hopes, though, Miss. There's only about twenty-five bodies left. If you haven't found your mother by now...” He trailed off.

“Miss Weber was recuperating from the fire,” Schmidt said. “She hasn't been here yet.”

“Oh. Why don't you come in right now, then? Most of the others are here for a second or third look. You really should have priority.”

“Thank you.”

Adele, Schmidt, and Muth followed the attendant into the makeshift morgue. Adele gasped when they walked in. Each body lay in an open coffin, surrounded by and covered with ice, so that only the face showed. The floor of the warehouse was wet with the runoff from the coffins, and a slight putrid smell permeated the air.

The attendant passed Mr. Muth along to another attendant, and then gave his full attention to Adele. “My name's Bob, Miss. I'll take you and your friend down the row.”

“Thank you.”

The three of them walked deliberately past the coffins, and as they did, Adele took a look at the face of each body. She covered her mouth with her hand to keep out the stench, and was grateful when Schmidt gave her a handkerchief to help.

They passed one body, then another and another, until finally they reached the end of the row. Adele took one look at the face, and recognition hit her like a punch in the stomach.

It was her mother.

She turned away, sobbing, and buried her head in Schmidt's shoulder.

“I take it this is the one,” Bob said.

Schmidt nodded, while Adele continued to cry.

“Could you give us a moment?” Schmidt asked the attendant, who nodded and backed away.

Adele hugged Mr. Schmidt even tighter, and in between her sobs, she said, “You didn't even try to save her. Why didn't you save her?”

“That's not fair, Adele,” Schmidt replied gently. “You know that in the end I tried to save everyone.”

Adele nodded and wiped away at her tears. “I know. I'm sorry. I just—”

“I understand.”

As soon as her tears were spent, she let go of Schmidt and the attendant scurried back. “Miss, would you come with me, please? We need you to fill out the death certificate and body removal permit.”

“I—I—” Adele began. Then she turned to look at Schmidt. “You were right,” she said. “It's too much.”

“I'll take care of it,” Schmidt said. “Lead the way.”

They followed the attendant to a nearby room and took care of the mundane business of death.

* * * *

Adele buried her mother on Black Saturday, June 18, at the Lutheran cemetery in Middle Village, Queens, along with most of the victims whose bodies had been found. She walked through the graveside funeral and burial with an eerie sense of detachment.

Back at her apartment, Adele sat at the dining room table, feeling emotionally drained, while Schmidt fiddled with his futuristic devices. She watched him in silence for a few minutes, and then finally spoke. "So, Mr. Schmidt. Did you get everything you needed?"

Schmidt nodded. "I think I have. I've recorded the tragedy through the memory recorders implanted in everyone's minds, including—"

He cut himself off, and left it for Adele to finish. "Including the minds of those who did not survive."

"Yes."

Adele pondered her next question carefully. "Do you have my mother's memories in there?"

"Um. Yes. Yes, I do."

She stood up and walked over to him. "Where's that helmet? I—I want to experience my mother's last moments."

"I really don't think that's such a good idea."

"But Mr. Schmidt—"

"Adele, these memories are meant to be experienced by people far removed from the original tragedy, people with no personal connection or loss. Are you sure you want to do this?"

She threw up her hands in frustration. "I don't know what I want! Perhaps I want to erase her memories, so no one ever sees them." She paused. "But I want to remember her, and I want others to as well."

He handed over the box. "Adele, I've brought up your mother's file. If you push that button, it will erase her memories."

Adele took the box and thought long and hard about what she was about to do. "I don't want anyone to violate her privacy. But I know how important this is to you. I can't make that choice. I can't deny her memories to history if you went to such trouble to mine them." She held the box out to Schmidt. "Do with them as you will."

Schmidt took the box back, and without hesitation he pushed the button. The box surprised Adele by speaking aloud in a monotone. "Memory file: Mathilde Weber. To erase, push the button again."

Schmidt pushed the button again. "Memory file: Mathilde Weber. Erased."

Adele took a deep breath. "Thank you."

Schmidt nodded. "We didn't need her recording anyway. Not as long as we have you to remember."

Adele nodded. "And apparently I have a very strong mind, you said. After all, the disorienter didn't work on me."

Schmidt blinked rapidly, then looked away.

"Mr. Schmidt? What is it?"

He looked directly at her. "Adele, I lied to you before about the disorienter. There are no minds strong enough to resist it. It works on everybody."

"Then why didn't it work on me?"

"You were right the first time. I couldn't bring myself to erase your memory of finding *Ship Ablaze*."

"Why couldn't you?"

He hesitated. "I didn't want you to go on the excursion. I wanted you to survive."

Adele smiled. "I love you too, Lucas."

He cleared his throat and rocked slowly back and forth on his feet. "I guess that's what I meant."

"I know," Adele said, and then she frowned. "When do you have to leave?"

"I ought to leave immediately. The longer I stay in 1904, the greater the chance I'll contaminate the timeline."

"If we love each other, Lucas, we should stay together."

He gave her a sad look. "I can't stay here in the past. I have a job, other missions. Responsibilities."

"If you can't stay in the past," Adele said, "then take me with you to the future."

Schmidt wiped a tear out of his eye. "I can't. The consequences could be disastrous."

"On a universe-destroying scale, or just a personal one?"

"Taking a person out of their proper time—"

"Is it so dangerous to remove me from 1904? From what you've said, I had a feeling that—well, let me put it to you this way. According to history—that is, your original history—did I survive?"

He looked away for a moment. "No. You did not."

She nodded, and looked around the room. "Well, there's nothing for me here anymore. My community has been ravaged by this conflagration. And, by your own arguments, my continued presence here would change history."

He shook his head. "Not significantly. You're but one person who is part of a tragedy that will be forgotten over the next hundred years."

"But even one person can make a difference. My presence here might alter the future, and you would return to a world where you do not exist."

"I—that is—" He paused.

"The consequences could be disastrous," Adele said, quoting his words back at him.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, smiling. "It would be safer for me to take you back to the future after all."

"Thank you."

“But the future is a strange place, Adele. I'm not sure how well you'll be able to cope.”

She moved closer and gently brushed his lips with hers. Schmidt's eyes opened wide, but he did not turn her away.

“If I go to the future,” she asked, “will you be with me?”

He hesitated, then nodded. “Always.”

“Then I imagine I shall be able to cope.”

“But what will you do in the future?”

“I thought that would be obvious. You came all the way back to my time to ensure that the future remembered the *General Slocum*. I shall go all the way forward to your time to ensure the same.”

Schmidt took her hand, and the past winked out of existence.

But never out of memory.

END

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