

All Stations Distress

By Joshua Chamberlain

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CHARACTER	DESCRIPTION
Carr Van Anda	late 40s; Managing Editor of <i>The New York Times</i>
Frederick T. Birchall	early 40s; Night City Editor
Tommy Bracken	late 20s; Secretary to the Managing Editor
Jack Paine	late 30s; Night Telegraph Editor
Alexander Woollcott	mid 20s; Staff Reporter
Eddie Stewart	early 20s; Copy Boy on the Night Telegraph Desk
Charles R. Miller	early 50s; Editor-in-Chief of <i>The New York Times</i>
Adolph Simon Ochs	mid 50s; Publisher and Owner of <i>The New York Times</i>

SETTING

The newsroom of *The New York Times*

SCENE

Act One: just past 1:00am, April 15th, 1912

Act Two: 10:00am, the same day

ACT ONE

*

Lights up on the newsroom of The New York Times--a grand room filled with wooden desks that hold typewriters, books, and candlestick telephones. A mess of paper is strewn about the room, coating the desks and floor like freshly fallen snow.

The upstage wall is lined with several large bookcases, filled with various encyclopedias, dictionaries, and volumes of history, science, and mathematics. The remaining wall space is adorned with maps of New York City, the continental United States, and the world. A page-a-day calendar mounted on the wall marks the date: April 15th, 1912.

The most prominent feature along the upstage wall is the door of a dumbwaiter, roughly 20 inches wide and 30 inches high.

A door with windows of frosted glass sits at up center, leading to a stairwell with access to the other offices and rooms throughout the building (the presses, the wireless room, the Morgue, etc.)

At far left, a second door leads to the Managing Editor's Office, a separate room upstage of the newsroom, visible to the audience, but cloaked in shadows. Inside, there is a desk covered in papers, several chairs, and a small leather couch. Mounted over the doorframe is a clock, ever watchful of the newsroom.

At up right, a hallway lined with doors to various other offices stretches upstage right and out of sight.

At rise, EDDIE STEWART sits in a chair down right, hunched over a small table and visibly distressed by the chessboard in front of him.

FREDERICK BIRCHALL is seated at his desk near center, tapping a pencil against his notebook.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT is slumped back in his chair, his feet on his desk as he reads a copy of *The New York Sun*.

TOMMY BRACKEN enters from the stairwell, an encyclopedia under one arm and a mess of papers in the other. He sits at his desk and begins leafing through his notes.

BRACKEN

How long has it been?

WOOLLCOTT

Fourteen minutes by my watch.

BIRCHALL

Only because he's taking his time.

BRACKEN

Has he said anything?

BIRCHALL

Nope.

STEWART

Shhh.

BRACKEN

What?

STEWART

I'm trying to focus.

WOOLLCOTT

Why bother? He's had you since the opening.

STEWART

No, I just gotta--

WOOLLCOTT

Probably before that, come to think of it. Shakes your hand, looks you up and down, and he's already plotting his endgame.

STEWART

No, I can still--

BRACKEN

Stewart, it's just an exercise in exploring your mind.

STEWART

Is that why we're doing this?

BRACKEN

That's it. He just wants to see how you think.

STEWART

And he can decipher that with a single game of chess?

BIRCHALL

Pretty much, yeah.

WOOLLCOTT

He doesn't expect you to win. It's not as if your entire future in journalism depends on a single game of chess.

BIRCHALL

Yes it does.

STEWART

See, this is why I asked you to be quiet.

BRACKEN

How long did you last against VA?

BIRCHALL

Eight minutes.

BRACKEN

Four minutes.

WOOLLCOTT

Twenty-eight seconds.

(beat)

What?

BRACKEN

Stewart, I'm telling you, you're overthinking it.

STEWART

Okay, I think I--

(He lifts his hand to move a piece, then hesitates.)

Nope.

BIRCHALL

Tommy, you heard that story where VA fired the copy boy who beat him at chess, right?

BRACKEN

He fired a copy boy who beat him at chess?

*

Yeah. BIRCHALL

What happened? WOOLLCOTT

Well...the copy boy beat VA at chess and then VA fired him. BIRCHALL

Is that really the whole story? BRACKEN

JACK PAINE, a nervous looking man in his late 30s, enters from the stairwell. PAINE

I'm screwed. BRACKEN

You're not screwed. PAINE

Fairbanks says I'm screwed. BRACKEN

When was the last time Wilson Fairbanks left the wireless room? BIRCHALL

What happened? BRACKEN

I had lunch with Thomas Sheridan. BIRCHALL

From the Roosevelt campaign? PAINE

Yeah. BIRCHALL

Why? PAINE

He's a friend from Columbia and we went to lunch, just to catch up. WOOLLCOTT

So? PAINE

He picked up the check.

WOOLLCOTT

Again I say, so?

PAINE

The Sun called to ask about it.

BIRCHALL

Wait, The Sun called you?

PAINE

They wanted to know if we'll be issuing an official endorsement for Roosevelt in the primaries.

BIRCHALL

We meaning?

PAINE

The Times.

WOOLLCOTT

Really?

PAINE

This is bad.

BRACKEN

No, it isn't.

BIRCHALL

Yeah, it is.

BRACKEN

Okay, so it is.

PAINE

You're not making me feel any better.

BIRCHALL

You want to feel better, start checking the want ads.

BRACKEN

It's only bad if it makes it to print. Denying them a comment was the first step in killing the story. They've got nothing.

PAINE

About that...

BRACKEN

Did you comment?

PAINE

See, the thing to remember here is--

BIRCHALL
Did you comment?

Paine looks around the room, unable to
make eye contact.

BIRCHALL (CONT'D)
You're an idiot, you know that?

PAINE
Fairbanks said I should.

BRACKEN
Since when is Fairbanks an expert in containing bad press?

PAINE
I don't know. He said explaining myself would make it go
away. And then...you know, it...didn't.

BIRCHALL
This is why Fairbanks works in a tiny room, all by himself.

BRACKEN
What else did he tell you?

PAINE
Well...

BRACKEN
What?

PAINE
He said I should talk to the editorial department.

BIRCHALL
Jesus.

BRACKEN
Did you?

PAINE
I left a message.

BIRCHALL
Jack, you're something else, you know that?

PAINE
What do I do?

BRACKEN
Pray they don't run it.

PAINE
You think that'll work?

BRACKEN

That's your best bet.

WOOLLCOTT

Personally, I think you're making too much of all this, but then again, making mountains of molehills is your vocation, isn't it?

BIRCHALL

You can't be serious.

WOOLLCOTT

No one will notice what with Taft and Roosevelt bludgeoning one another on the front page of every page from Boston to Boca Raton. Realistically, what's the worst that could happen?

PAINE

The Sun runs the story, we get bombarded with questions about endorsing Roosevelt, and VA fires me.

WOOLLCOTT

Jack, nothing to worry about. It's not a story.

BIRCHALL

It is if they run it.

WOOLLCOTT

Well, at least they had the decency to call and ask for a comment.

BRACKEN

At least you didn't beat VA at chess.

Stewart stands to make a beeline for the closest exit. Woollcott stops him at the door.

WOOLLCOTT

Sit down, Mr. Stewart.

BRACKEN

That story's not even true, don't worry about it.

BIRCHALL

Sure it is.

BRACKEN

I'm telling you it isn't.

BIRCHALL

And the one about Grant is, right?

BRACKEN

Damn right it is. You heard that one, Stewart?

STEWART

Which one?

BRACKEN

VA's reporting on Grant's death.

BIRCHALL

Don't listen to him. Not a word of it's true.

STEWART

What happened?

BIRCHALL

This was back when he was on the telegraph desk at The Herald. Woulda been, what? '77 maybe?

WOOLLCOTT

What on earth makes you think I have the faintest idea?

PAINE

Sounds about right, yeah.

BIRCHALL

Grant died in '85.

BRACKEN

Alright then, it was '85. Grant's been on his deathbed for weeks. VA's working day and night, stuck to the telegraph, waiting for word. He's driving the editor out of his mind. Finally, one night, the editor's on his way out and insists VA go with him. He says Grant still has some life left in him and there's no point in burning the midnight oil. VA shrugs, grabs his coat and hat, and follows the editor out. They get to the street, the editor goes left and VA goes right. Then he rounds the block, goes back into the office, and heads to his desk. He rearranges the whole front page make-up himself, orients the type and composition--in the dark, mind you--and holds the printing staff until dawn. Then, just after five, word comes across the wire that Grant has died. They had it on the press in twenty minutes, scooping every other paper in town.

STEWART

He did the whole thing in the dark?

BRACKEN

He did the whole thing in the dark.

STEWART

Why?

BRACKEN

(beat)
You know, I don't know.

WOOLLCOTT

He's nocturnal.

BIRCHALL

Bull.

PAINE

Look at the hours he keeps.

STEWART

You know, I did notice that.

PAINE

He's here all afternoon, goes home for dinner, then back at ten o'clock and stays all night. He's an animal.

BIRCHALL

Not exactly conducive to raising a family.

STEWART

He's got kids?

PAINE

Two.

BRACKEN

You seem surprised.

STEWART

Just never heard him mention them.

BIRCHALL

You won't.

BRACKEN

The news is his everything.

STEWART

That stuff about Grant though. Is it true?

BIRCHALL

C'mon, kid.

STEWART

You don't believe it?

BIRCHALL

Every man is only made of myths.

BRACKEN

Myths like firing the copy boy for winning a game of chess.

BIRCHALL

That actually happened though.

BRACKEN

VA's never fired anybody in his life.

PAINE

God, I hope that's true.

STEWART

But the one about Grant, is that true?

BRACKEN

Swear to Christ.

BIRCHALL

There's no way. Nobody's that good.

PAINE

I know a guy who works the night desk at the Herald. It's true. He's never taken a byline either.

WOOLLCOTT

Please. There's not a newspaperman alive who doesn't salivate at the thought of his name in print.

PAINE

Have you seen his name anywhere in the paper, in all the time he's been here?

BIRCHALL

That's because he's an editor.

PAINE

You see Ochs' name in print every so often, right? Miller's too. But never VA's. Not during his time in Baltimore, Cleveland.

WOOLLCOTT

How is it you know all this?

PAINE

My friend at the Herald said so.

WOOLLCOTT

Is that friend now employed by the Roosevelt campaign?

PAINE

Shouldn't you be working?

WOOLLCOTT

I am working.

PAINE

I meant finishing your coverage of the Black Hand murders in Brooklyn.

WOOLLCOTT

It's locked. O'Neill's looking at it now.

BIRCHALL

Jack's right. Shouldn't you be--I don't know--doing something?

WOOLLCOTT

Ah, but I am doing something.

BIRCHALL

You're reading The Sun.

WOOLLCOTT

Boning up on the competition.

PAINE

There anything about me and Sheridan?

WOOLLCOTT

Jack, I swear, your anxiety borders on monomaniacal.

PAINE

Is there?

WOOLLCOTT

No, there isn't. Now would you relax? You're on the cusp of giving me an ulcer.

PAINE

Yeah.

BRACKEN

You do realize of course that buying that paper means lining the pockets of our direct competitors with your hard-earned pocket change.

WOOLLCOTT

Not exactly.

BRACKEN

Not exactly what?

WOOLLCOTT

I didn't buy the paper.

BIRCHALL
What do you mean you didn't buy it?

BRACKEN
Did you steal it?

WOOLLCOTT
As if I'd stoop to petty larceny.

PAINE
I don't understand.

WOOLLCOTT
What's not to understand? I didn't buy it and I didn't steal it.

PAINE
Then where'd you get it?

WOOLLCOTT
Garbage can in Times Square.

PAINE
I loathe you.

WOOLLCOTT
You love me.

PAINE
Fred, is there any way I could sift through your notes for the folo on the Pennsylvania Primary?

BIRCHALL
Why?

PAINE
You talked to Sheridan, right?

WOOLLCOTT
Jack, I told you to relax.

PAINE
I just wanna read his notes.

BRACKEN
Can you at least be quiet while you do it? I have to finish the daily historical brief.

STEWART
Daily historical brief?

BIRCHALL
VA makes him do it.

BRACKEN

Comes with running the Morgue.

BIRCHALL

I thought it was because you misspelled the French ambassador's name on the front page.

BRACKEN

Thanks for reminding everyone. Honestly though, as far as punishment goes, it's not all that bad. Helps keeps things in perspective.

PAINE

Isn't that the whole point?

BRACKEN

(reading a memo)

"To assist in providing historical context for world events as they develop."

STEWART

What is it?

BRACKEN

Sort of a "on this day in history" memo.

STEWART

I've never seen anything like that in The Times.

BRACKEN

It's just for internal office staff, we never print it.

STEWART

Why?

WOOLLCOTT

That's not the first time you'll find yourself asking that question.

BIRCHALL

What do you have so far, Tommy?

BRACKEN

Today in history: April 16th -- 1882: General Electric is formed amidst the merger of Edison General Electric Company and the Thomas-Houston Electric Company. 1755: Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language is first published in London. 1736: The Kingdom of Corsica is founded with the crowning of Theodore Stephan Freiherr von Neuhoff.

WOOLLCOTT

Theodore Stephan Freiherr von Neuhoff?

BRACKEN

Theodore Stephan Freiherr von Neuhoff.

WOOLLCOTT

What sick soul would inflict a child with such a name?

BRACKEN

A member of the German aristocracy.

BIRCHALL

You can tell today's a slow news day.

PAINE

Didn't Lincoln die today?

WOOLLCOTT

He died on the 14th.

STEWART

It was the 15th.

BIRCHALL

He got shot on the 14th, died on the 15th.

PAINE

You sure?

BIRCHALL

Pretty sure.

BRACKEN

That's right. There's that story about Lincoln on his deathbed, surrounded by members of the Cabinet. And that quote from Stanton, who's standing bedside just as Lincoln passes, then he bows his head and says--

*

We see a man in the doorway of the stairwell. His voice, clear and precise, precedes him as he enters.

VAN ANDA

"Now he belongs to the ages..."

This is CARR VAN ANDA, Managing Editor of The New York Times, the man who the staff refer to as "VA." He appears trim and neat with a cigar in his hand. The men all sit a little straighter and attempt to appear busy, with the exception of Woollcott.

VAN ANDA

We should all be so lucky, shouldn't we?

BRACKEN

Evening, VA.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Birchall, do we have anything else on the Pennsylvania Primary for the morning edition?

BIRCHALL

Nothing else for the time being, sir.

VAN ANDA

And the Black Hand murders?

WOOLLCOTT

I sent five-hundred words down to O'Neill about twenty minutes ago.

VAN ANDA

Mr. O'Neill and I just finished make-up. Was there anything else to arrange before we start the presses?

BRACKEN

Percy Soule sent word on an accident in Harrington Park, New Jersey. The floor of a church collapsed, killing two parishioners.

VAN ANDA

It's been proofed and included. Thank you, Mr. Bracken. But no further updates on the Primary?

BIRCHALL

That's correct, sir.

VAN ANDA

(picking up the closest phone)

Something tells me Mr. Roosevelt is going to enjoy reading the news over breakfast.

(into phone)

Make-up please, Margaret.

(beat)

Run it, Mr. O'Neill.

Van Anda hangs up the phone, then crosses to Stewart and the chessboard. Stewart shrinks in his seat at Van Anda's approach.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Now, where were we, Mr. Stewart?

STEWART

Just, um...

Stewart hastily moves a piece, abandoning his prior planning in a moment of panic.

VAN ANDA

Ah, interesting... The Giuoco Piano. Very interesting...

Van Anda counters by moving a piece almost instantly. Stewart takes this in and appears even more distressed than before.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Sit with that one a while, son. Now, can anyone tell me--?

WOOLLCOTT

Oh, dear lord...

VAN ANDA

Ah yes, we come to Mr. Woolcott's favorite part of the evening. Can anyone tell me what the phrase, "Historia vitae magistra" means?

WOOLLCOTT

History validates mischief.

PAINE

Seriously?

WOOLLCOTT

I don't speak Greek.

PAINE

Latin.

VAN ANDA

Anyone else?

WOOLLCOTT

I guarantee, at no other paper in this city are people quote Greek verse to one another.

PAINE

Latin verse.

STEWART

"History is the teacher of life."

VAN ANDA

(smiling)

Careful, gentlemen. You may come in one morning to find Mr. Stewart sitting at your desk.

WOOLLCOTT

Perhaps I'm naive, but I don't see how fluency in a dead language equips one for a career as a journalist. *

VAN ANDA

Mr. Birchall, care to venture why we're having this conversation?

BIRCHALL

I assume you're citing Roman poets to remind us the importance of history when reporting the day's news.

VAN ANDA

No, I'm citing Roman poets to tell Mr. Woollcott to get his feet off his desk.

Woollcott sits upright in his seat.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

But your point is well taken, Mr. Birchall. I know it's late, I know it's a slow night, but these are the crucial hours, gentlemen, the moments when papers are *made*. Let's keep our eyes on the prize, shall we?

ALL

(collective mumbles of agreement)

VAN ANDA

Thank you, gentlemen. As you were.

Van Anda crosses to the Editor's Office, but turns back just before exiting.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Oh, and Mr. PAINE.

PAINE

Sir?

VAN ANDA

The next time you go to lunch with Thomas Sheridan, separate checks.

PAINE

And the story, sir?

What story? VAN ANDA

Yes, sir. PAINE

Van Anda exits into the Editor's Office.

Gioco Piano? STEWART

Yeah, he does that. BIRCHALL

How did he--? PAINE

What did I tell you? Nothing to worry about. WOOLLCOTT

Yeah, you were right. PAINE

I'm sorry, once more so the folks in the peanut gallery can hear you. WOOLLCOTT

I said you were right. PAINE

Yes. Yes, I was. WOOLLCOTT

And you're never going to let me forget it, are you? PAINE

Oh, you know me so well. See, were I in your shoes, I'd have cut it off right at the source. The Sun calls and you deny the story, plain and simple. WOOLLCOTT

I tried that. PAINE

And then wound up commenting anyway? BIRCHALL

They had me cornered, what do you want from me? PAINE

This whole episode might have been avoided if you were a better liar. WOOLLCOTT

PAINÉ

I'm a perfectly adequate liar.

BRACKEN

Because perfectly adequate is the true threshold for greatness.

WOOLLCOTT

Deception is a skill that requires years of practice, but when you've mastered it, the world is your oyster. It's the key to my success at the card table.

PAINÉ

I'm good at cards too.

WOOLLCOTT

No, you're not.

PAINÉ

Yes, I am.

BIRCHALL

Then why have he and Percy Soule been cleaning you out every Friday night for the last two years? *

PAINÉ

I have the poker face of a Greek effigy.

BIRCHALL

You have the poker face of a French schoolgirl.

PAINÉ

I loathe you.

WOOLLCOTT

You love me.

The dumbwaiter crashes down from above with a loud bang. A startled Stewart nearly falls from his seat.

BIRCHALL

Easy there. Just the wireless.

WOOLLCOTT

You'll get used to it.

PAINÉ

I'm still not used to it.

WOOLLCOTT

That's because you're a bundle of nerves incapable of dropping your shoulders and unclenching your jaw.

PAINE

Thank you for your diagnosis, Dr. Freud. Just wasn't expecting anything from the wireless room at this time of night.

BIRCHALL

The news waits for no man.

PAINE

No, I mean, when I left, Fairbanks was clipping his toenails.

BRACKEN

Definitely the kind of man I want giving me career advice.

Stewart crosses upstage to the dumbwaiter and pulls a piece of paper from the box. As he reads, shock and confusion flash across his face.

BRACKEN

What?

BIRCHALL

Stewart, what is it?

STEWART

I think you need to see this.

Paine crosses to him, takes the paper, and reads.

PAINE

God.

WOOLLCOTT

What?

Bracken rushes to Paine and reads over his shoulder. Paine hands the paper to Birchall.

BIRCHALL

Get VA in here. Now.

Bracken rushes into the Editor's Office.

WOOLLCOTT

What is it?

PAINE

Jesus--

Bracken and Van Anda enter.

VAN ANDA

When?

PAINE

Just now. Fairbanks sent it down--

Van Anda takes the slip of paper from
Birchall and reads.

WOOLLCOTT

Would someone please tell me--?

Van Anda hands Woollcott the paper,
then picks up a nearby phone. Birchall
rolls paper in his typewriter and
begins to type.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Bracken, I want you down in the Morgue.

BRACKEN

Yes, sir.

VAN ANDA

(into the phone)

The make-up room please, Margaret.

(to Bracken)

I want everything we've got in the records. Notes on the
construction, the additional safety measures, life boats,
whatever you can find.

BRACKEN

Right away.

Bracken exits through the stairwell in
a hurry.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Birchall, I need five hundred words on her departure from
Southampton.

BIRCHALL

(typing)

Already on it, sir.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Paine, check in with Mr. Fairbanks. We need to know what
he knows as he knows it.

PAINE

(picking up his phone)

Yes, sir.

VAN ANDA

(into phone)

Mr. O'Neill, we're tearing out the lead...You heard me. How much time can you give us?...We'll have something for you in twenty minutes.

PAINE

(into phone)

Can I have the wireless room please, Margaret?

VAN ANDA

(hanging up the phone)

Mr. Woollcott, ice warnings.

WOOLLCOTT

(into phone)

Margaret my dear, I need the Hydrographic Office in Washington...That's right.

PAINE

(into phone)

Wilson, It's Jack. Just the one so far?

VAN ANDA

And someone get in touch with Percy Soule. We're going to need him at the White Star Line.

Birchall picks up his phone. *

Van Anda stands back to watch his staff at work for a moment.

STEWART

What about me, sir?

BIRCHALL

Margaret? Patch me through to Percy Soule's house, would you?

WOOLLCOTT

(into phone)

Yes, hello. This is Alexander Woollcott from The New York Times.

VAN ANDA

I need you right there, Mr. Stewart.

PAINE

(into phone)

Is there anything else coming?

STEWART

I don't understand.

WOOLLCOTT

(into phone)

I'm calling in regard to a wire report we've just received from the Associated Press.

BIRCHALL

(into phone)

Perc, Fred...Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know...Cost of the life we lead.

VAN ANDA

(looking at the chessboard)

The news is a story we tell, Mr. Stewart. It starts as facts and quotes and statistics.

WOOLLCOTT

You said from the Amerika, correct?

BIRCHALL

(into phone)

Because you're the best leg-man on the payroll and you know it.

VAN ANDA

Our job is putting these things together and trying to decipher what they tell us.

PAINE

(into phone)

We're going to need them minute-by-minute.

VAN ANDA

These things are like a puzzle or an equation. It takes focus, an eye on every variable.

WOOLLCOTT

(into phone)
And that was relayed by...?

BIRCHALL
The White Star Line. Number 11, Broadway. Call me when you're there and I'll bring you up to speed.

PAINE
(into phone)
The moment you hear anything--

VAN ANDA
And tonight, I need you to keep me sharp.

STEWART
Yes, sir.

BIRCHALL
(into phone)
Gotta go, Deadline. Yeah...Yeah...Yeah. Margaret'll put you through.

Birchall hangs up.

STEWART
Mr. Van Anda, sir?

VAN ANDA
VA, please son.

STEWART
VA?

VAN ANDA
Yes?

STEWART
(looking at the slip of paper)
What does it mean?

VAN ANDA
Mr. Roosevelt is going to find himself on page two when he sits down to breakfast.

Van Anda crosses to center with the slip of paper in hand. The lights shift as he moves.

Bracken enters, carrying a stack of books and papers. He sits at his desk and begins to pour through the volumes, making notes with a pencil. Occasionally, he stands and exits, only to return with more files and papers.

Paine and Woollcott both work the phones. They pace and take down notes, which they pass to Birchall, still seated at his desk and typing wildly without looking up.

A spotlight rises to meet Van Anda at center as the staff cascades around him. He reads from the slip of paper: an AP wire report.

VAN ANDA

(reading)

"At 10:25 tonight, the White Star Line steamship, Titanic, called 'CQD' to the Marconi station at Cape Race, Newfoundland, and reported having struck an iceberg. The steamer said that immediate assistance was required..."

Van Anda steps back into the scene. Birchall stands, rips the paper from his typewriter, and hands it to Van Anda, who sits and begins to make revisions with a pencil. Paine and Woollcott stand before a large map of the Atlantic, hung from the upstage wall. Bracken exits through the stairwell, returning to the Morgue.

PAINE

According to the station in Halifax, the Caronia transmitted a warning about ice roughly here.

Paine measures on the map and shades in an area with a pencil.

WOOLLCOTT

That matches the report from the Noordam. Washington picked up their message a just before noon.

Van Anda scratches out several words on Birchall's report.

BIRCHALL

What?

VAN ANDA

Adjectives.

PAINE

I've also got a report from the S.S. Pisa. "In Latitude 46 degrees, 6 minutes and longitude 49 degrees, 43 minutes west met with extensive field ice and sighted seven bergs of considerable size."

Woollcott shades in another area on the map as Paine reads.

VAN ANDA

(handing paper back to
Birchall)

Alright, get a clean copy down to O'Neill. We've got four minutes to deadline.

BIRCHALL

Yes, sir.

Birchall rushes back to his desk, rolls a fresh piece of paper in his typewriter and types.

VAN ANDA

Where are we, gentlemen?

PAINE

Still cross referencing ice warnings. Between Halifax and DC, I think we have almost everything from the last twenty-four hours.

WOOLLCOTT

(shading area on map)

The Amerika sent word of several large icebergs here and here.

VAN ANDA

What's the source?

WOOLLCOTT

The Hydrographic Office in DC.

VAN ANDA

The Amerika you said?

WOOLLCOTT

That's right.

VAN ANDA

She'd be too far out for her signal to reach shore.

WOOLLCOTT

They said the Titanic passed it along.

VAN ANDA

Any other reports of icebergs?

PAINE

Belts too. Whole fields of ice, nearly impossible to navigate. Warnings from both the Californian and the Mesba.

VAN ANDA

Where?

Paine studies his notes a moment, then shades in a substantial area of the map.

PAINE

Here.

VAN ANDA

And the Titanic's last known location?

PAINE

41 degrees 46 minutes north, 48 degrees, 14 minutes west.

Van Anda crosses to the map and marks the Titanic's position, in the direct center of the ice fields Paine has just marked.

VAN ANDA

Nearly impossible to navigate?

PAINE

That's correct, sir.

Birchall takes the paper from his typewriter once more and hands it to Van Anda, who reads.

VAN ANDA

(picking up the phone)

Get it down to O'Neill, we're going to print.

(into phone)

Margaret, let Mr. O'Neill know the lead is on its way.

Van Anda hands the paper to Birchall, who hands it to Woollcott, who hands it to Paine, who looks at Stewart.

PAINÉ
Isn't this the kid's job?

STEWART
Should I be--?

VAN ANDA
No.

Birchall takes the paper and exits through the stairwell in a hurry. Van Anda crosses to Stewart and moves a chess piece.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)
Mr. Paine, I'd like you upstairs in the wireless room.

PAINÉ
What for, sir?

VAN ANDA
We may have the morning edition locked, but this story isn't anywhere close to finished. Regardless of what happens next, there's going to be a flurry of chatter over the wire and if I know Mr. Fairbanks, he's going to need a hand--probably two.

WOOLLCOTT
That's a wager I'd take.

Paine shoots Woollcott a look. Woollcott shrugs.

VAN ANDA
If you'd be so kind, Mr. Paine.

PAINÉ
Yes, sir.

Paine exits through the stairwell. Van Anda crossed upstage to the map and studies it. Birchall returns and crosses to meet Van Anda.

BIRCHALL
You know she won't sink.

VAN ANDA
I'm sorry?

BIRCHALL
The Titanic. She won't sink.

VAN ANDA

What makes you so sure?

BIRCHALL

She's designed to hold water. Worst case, they ferry passengers off and another ship tows her to port. Look at the Republic collision a few years back.

WOOLLCOTT

The Republic sank.

BIRCHALL

My point is, there's precedent for an emergency like this. And the Republic wasn't built with the same safety features as the Titanic.

Bracken enters from the stairwell,
carrying a cluster of files and papers.

WOOLLCOTT

You're an expert in shipbuilding all of a sudden?

BIRCHALL

I wrote a profile on the launch last May. Interviewed reps from the White Star Line, a few of the builders, the works. By all accounts, the Titanic is unsinkable.

WOOLLCOTT

Unsinkable?

BIRCHALL

That's the word from the White Star Line.

WOOLLCOTT

Talk, talk, talk.

BIRCHALL

Even without watertight doors, it's not like ice poses a serious threat to modern ships. Look at the Niagara.

WOOLLCOTT

That's no guarantee of anything.

BRACKEN

What happened to the Niagara?

WOOLLCOTT

She sent word of a collision with an iceberg. Punctured her hull.

BRACKEN

And she's still afloat?

WOOLLCOTT

So far.

VAN ANDA

When is she due?

WOOLLCOTT

Sometime today.

VAN ANDA

Where did this take place?

WOOLLCOTT

(crossing to the map)

Roughly here.

VAN ANDA

Has there been any word from the White Star Line?

WOOLLCOTT

At this ungodly hour?

VAN ANDA

Suppose we keep trying, Mr. Woollcott. Someone's bound to pick up the phone eventually.

WOOLLCOTT

If you insist.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Birchall, give me two hundred words on the Niagara incident for the city edition. Now, Mr. Bracken, what do we have?

BRACKEN

The Titanic was to leave Southampton at noon on Wednesday, but was delayed following a near collision with the New York. She arrived in Cherbourg to collect passengers that evening, docked in Queenstown Thursday afternoon, and then headed out to open sea.

VAN ANDA

Anything on the safety features, those watertight doors Mr. Birchall is so fond of?

BRACKEN

A few photographs from one of the trades, but nothing specific. I know there's one somewhere with blueprints, but I haven't found it.

VAN ANDA

Keep looking. And see if you can put a passenger list together while you're at it. We need the name of every person on that boat.

BRACKEN

I'll see what I can do.

BIRCHALL

(beat)

She's a ship.

VAN ANDA

I'm sorry?

BIRCHALL

The Titanic is a ship, not a boat.

BRACKEN

What's the difference?

BIRCHALL

Boats cross rivers. Ships cross oceans.

BRACKEN

They both ferry people back and forth across bodies of water.

BIRCHALL

Doesn't make them synonyms.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Birchall--

STEWART

What does it mean? The message the Titanic sent. "CQD."

VAN ANDA

The "CQ" come from the French word "sécurité" and is used as the general maritime call--"all stations." The "D" was added by the Marconi International Marine Communication company in 1904 to indicate "distress." Therefore--

STEWART

"All Stations: Distress."

(quietly)

Didn't realize I was going to get the complete history and etymology of the term.

WOOLLCOTT

By this point, I'd have figured you'd know not to ask.

STEWART

That's a mistake I won't be making again.

Paine rushes in from the stairwell,
winded and holding a piece of paper.

PAINE

(gasping for breath)

They're launching the lifeboats.

Van Anda snatches the paper from Paine
and reads.

BIRCHALL

What did I say? Ferrying people off so they can tow her.

PAINE

Fred--

BIRCHALL

Standard procedure.

PAINE

Fred, there's not word of a ship anywhere near her. It's not
a rescue, it's an evacuation.

VAN ANDA

Their last message reads they're sinking by the head. Mr.
Bracken, how many lifeboats?

BRACKEN

(looking at his notes)

Uh...fourteen with capacity for sixty-five, four collapsables
that can hold forty-seven apiece, and two wooden cutters for
extreme emergency. They can hold forty.

VAN ANDA

All told, room for how many?

BRACKEN

(adding)

One thousand, one hundred, seventy-eight.

VAN ANDA

And how many passengers?

PAINE

(beat)

Twenty-two hundred, including crew.

A long pause.

VAN ANDA

Alright.

(beat)

We're going with an extra edition.

Van Anda picks up a nearby phone.

BIRCHALL

That says what?

VAN ANDA

We're expanding our coverage of the sinking.

(into phone)

Margaret, let Mr. O'Neill know we'll be drafting new make-up for the city edition. Thank you.

BIRCHALL

We can't report that she's sinking.

BRACKEN

Why else would she send a distress call, launch the lifeboats?

BIRCHALL

Standard precaution, ferrying passengers.

BRACKEN

Ferrying them where? There's not another ship for a hundred miles.

BIRCHALL

We can't run that she's sinking.

BRACKEN

She just wired she's sinking!

A telephone rings in the background.
Woollcott answers.

WOOLLCOTT

(into phone)

This is Woollcott.

Birchall takes a rolled piece of paper from Bracken's desk and lays it out in front of him.

BIRCHALL

Alright, look. The Titanic was designed with sixteen watertight compartments, divided by fifteen bulkheads that run as far up as D Deck, well above the water line. All Captain Smith has to do is say the word, the bulkheads shut and the ship stays afloat.

*

VAN ANDA

Be that as it may, they've sent a distress call indicating that they're sinking, Mr. Birchall.

BIRCHALL

All I'm saying is there are precautions in place we should consider before we jump to conclusions. If our banner in the city edition reads, "Titanic sinking in North Atlantic," the average reader who picks up his paper at the corner newsstand isn't going to see the word "sinking." He'll see "sank."

BRACKEN

You don't trust our readership to tell the difference between present and past tense?

BIRCHALL

If it turns out the watertight doors have failed, then fine. But let's wait for that to happen before we print it in our newspaper.

BRACKEN

It's happening right now.

BIRCHALL

We don't know that. We can't run the Titanic sank in the morning edition, then turn around and say she's being towed to port in the evening edition.

VAN ANDA

Enough.

BRACKEN

But we--

VAN ANDA

I said enough. Mr. Bracken, what do we have on the watertight doors?

BRACKEN

I'll need more time in the Morgue.

VAN ANDA

How much more?

BRACKEN

An hour, maybe more.

VAN ANDA
You have thirty minutes.

BRACKEN
Yes, sir.

Bracken exits through the stairwell in a hurry.

BIRCHALL
Thank you, sir.

VAN ANDA
Don't thank me, Mr. Birchall.

WOOLLCOTT
(into phone)
Of course. Thank you.

(to Van Anda)
The White Star Line.

VAN ANDA
What's the word?

WOOLLCOTT
On the record?

(reading from his notes)
"We place absolute confidence in the Titanic. We believe that the boat is unsinkable."

BIRCHALL
Boat?

WOOLLCOTT
Boat.

BIRCHALL
Is that a direct quote?

VAN ANDA
Off the record?

WOOLLCOTT
They have no idea what's going on. They have word of the distress call from the Baltic and the Olympic, but nothing solid. Word is Franklin is still trying to reach Captain Smith.

BIRCHALL
But they said that, they used the word "unsinkable."

WOOLLCOTT
They did indeed.

BIRCHALL
Case in point.

VAN ANDA
Let's not get ahead of ourselves, Mr. Birchall. They know as little as we do.

BIRCHALL
Precisely my point. We have the iceberg, the distress call, and the lifeboats. That's plenty for the city edition.

VAN ANDA
(checking the clock)
Not yet.

BIRCHALL
You want to wait?

VAN ANDA
I do.

BIRCHALL
For what?

VAN ANDA
We have facts, the raw materials. But there isn't a picture yet.

BIRCHALL
A picture? Can't we pull from--?

VAN ANDA
No, I don't mean a literal picture. I mean there isn't a story yet. We don't have the scope of this thing.

BIRCHALL
The scope?

VAN ANDA
What do the facts tell us?

BIRCHALL
The Titanic struck an iceberg, sent a distress call, and is evacuating its passengers.

VAN ANDA
And our headline is somewhere in the space between those things. Make no mistake, we're going to run this story, but before we do so, I'd like to see what happens next.

Van Anda crosses to the chessboard.
Birchall returns to his desk.

WOOLLCOTT

(to Birchall)

Assuming the picture doesn't reveal itself, we could always run something from the latest National Geographic.

BIRCHALL

Go to hell.

Woollcott chuckles.

Stewart moves a chess piece as Van Anda sits across from him.

VAN ANDA

Ah, a discovered attack.

STEWART

I think I'm beginning to get the hang of this.

VAN ANDA

I'd say so, however...

Van Anda moves a piece.

STEWART

Dammit.

VAN ANDA

Don't overthink this one. See the whole board.

(beat)

The magnificent thing about this game, Mr. Stewart, is it requires patience. Precision. And yet, it also demands something more of you.

STEWART

What's that?

The dumbwaiter crashes down. Paine rushes to the door and retrieves a slip of paper.

VAN ANDA

Timing.

Van Anda stands and crosses to the dumbwaiter. Paine hands him the slip of paper.

She's gone.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

What?

WOOLLCOTT

Wait a minute--

BIRCHALL

The Titanic is at the bottom of the ocean.

VAN ANDA

Let me see.

BIRCHALL

Birchall snatches the paper and reads.

BIRCHALL (CONT'D)

It just says her wireless is out.

PAINE

(reading)

"The last signals from the Titanic were heard by the Virginian at 12:27am."

BIRCHALL

That doesn't mean anything.

PAINE

"The wireless operator on the Virginian says the signals were blurred and ended abruptly."

BIRCHALL

Nowhere in that bulletin does it say the Titanic sank.

VAN ANDA

It doesn't have to.

BIRCHALL

You're telling me, just because her wireless is out, you think--?

VAN ANDA

I do.

BIRCHALL

VA, there are any number of reasons her wireless could cease transmission. Flooding in the wireless room, radio interference, failure of the ship's electrical system.

PAINE

Technically, he's correct.

VAN ANDA

(examining notes on one of the desks)

The wireless room is on the boat deck, near the officer's quarters. If it's been flooded, the whole ship is underwater.

PAINE

He's got you there.

BIRCHALL

Radio interference then.

VAN ANDA

Not likely.

BIRCHALL

I'm not asking if it's likely, I'm asking if it's possible.

PAINE

Possible, yes. Probable, no.

BIRCHALL

What makes you say that?

PAINE

The Titanic is equipped with a five-kilowatt rotary spark-gap transmitter with an operating frequency of 500 kilohertz, guaranteeing a broadcast radius of a least three hundred miles. Paired with the fact that radio waves bouncing off the ionosphere have a greater wavelength at night--

WOOLLCOTT

In English, professor...

PAINE

The Titanic has some of the most advanced and powerful wireless technology in the world. Her signal strength is far greater than most other ships on the water.

VAN ANDA

What are you saying, Mr. Paine?

PAINE

To say her wireless ceased operation in the middle of a distress call due to loss of signal is, well...nonsensical.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Woollcott, see if Mr. Fairbanks can get in touch with Cape Race. I want everything we can get from the Virginian.

Woollcott sits at his desk and picks up his phone.

BIRCHALL

We're not actually chasing this, are we?

WOOLLCOTT

Fairbanks, if you please, Margaret.

VAN ANDA

Why wouldn't we, Mr. Birchall?

WOOLLCOTT

(into phone)

Wilson, has there been any additional word from Cape Race?

BIRCHALL

What about the water tight doors?

VAN ANDA

What about them?

WOOLLCOTT

(into phone)

The Virginian specifically...VA wants everything he can get his paws on.

BIRCHALL

They were designed specifically for emergencies like this one.

VAN ANDA

As you've been so kind to remind us all.

BIRCHALL

Only because everyone seems to have forgotten that we built ourselves an unsinkable ship.

VAN ANDA

An unsinkable ship that appears to have just sunk.

WOOLLCOTT

(into phone)

Just a minute, when?

(to Van Anda)

Cape Race lost the Virginian.

PAINE

Just like that?

WOOLLCOTT

Just like that.

BIRCHALL

I'm sorry, what was that about wireless reception?

PAINE

What about it?

VAN ANDA

The Virginian has been on the water almost ten years. Her wireless is nearly an antique.

WOOLLCOTT

(into phone)

Yes, yes, the minute you hear.

Woollcott hangs up the phone. Bracken enters from the stairwell with more papers and books.

BIRCHALL

Regardless, losing the Titanic's signal doesn't mean she's gone under.

BRACKEN

What a minute, what?

BIRCHALL

VA thinks the Titanic is gone.

BRACKEN

Gone?

PAINE

Gone as in taking up residence at the bottom of the North Atlantic.

VAN ANDA

Her wireless transmission.

BIRCHALL

We just lost touch with the Virginian, who's to say we didn't lose the Titanic the same way?

PAINE

I told you, her transmitter is stronger--

BIRCHALL

Okay, yeah, yeah. What about the dynamos though? What if it was an electrical failure?

BRACKEN

If that's the case, then VA's right, she's gone.

Hold on...
BIRCHALL

No, let me show you.
BRACKEN

What about--
BIRCHALL

Don't say it.
STEWART

--the watertight doors?
BIRCHALL

He said it.
STEWART

Bracken sits at his desk, takes a pencil, and draws on a piece of paper. The others gather around him.

BRACKEN
Fred was right in his description of the ship's design. Fifteen bulkheads dividing the lower decks of the ship into sixteen compartments, which can be closed using a series of twelve doors, operated from the bridge.

WOOLLCOTT
I wasn't aware they were giving away degrees in nautical engineering in the basement.

BRACKEN
I just read the material.

PAINE
Might as well be Greek to me.

WOOLLCOTT
Don't you mean Latin?

PAINE
Remind us all once more how you got this job.

WOOLLCOTT
Charm, good looks, and blatant nepotism.

VAN ANDA
What's your source, Mr. Bracken?

BRACKEN

The trade I mentioned, a shipbuilder magazine from last July. It says--and I'm quoting here, "Each door is held in the open position by a suitable friction clutch, which can be instantly released by means of a powerful electro-magnet controlled from the captain's bridge, so that in the event of accident, the captain can, by simply moving an electric switch, instantly close up the doors throughout and make the vessel practically unsinkable."

WOOLLCOTT

Worded precisely like my quote from the White Star Line.

(flipping through his notes)

"We place absolute confidence in the Titanic. We believe the boat is unsinkable."

VAN ANDA

Is this where the unsinkable line comes from?

BRACKEN

As far as I can tell. None of the other press releases I've found have such language. Almost as if the rumor started here and everyone ran with it.

VAN ANDA

Your best guess, Mr. Bracken. Even with the watertight compartments, could she sink?

BRACKEN

Depends on the extent of the damage. She's designed to take on water, but there's no way of telling how much.

BIRCHALL

Still doesn't explain the dynamos.

BRACKEN

They're sinking from the head?

VAN ANDA

According to the wire reports.

BRACKEN

The dynamos that power the ship are housed on the lowest deck, near the stern. Obviously, I can't say for sure, but if there's sinking by the head and there's water in this portion of the ship, there's water everywhere.

(beat)

She would sink.

BIRCHALL

Alright, stop.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Birchall--

BIRCHALL

No, I can't listen to anymore. She didn't sink. She can't sink.

PAINE

Says you.

BIRCHALL

Says the White Star Line.

WOOLLCOTT

On the record, but off the record--

BIRCHALL

Well, we can't print what's off the record, can we?

WOOLLCOTT

They have no idea what's going on.

BIRCHALL

Neither do we! Why is that so goddamn hard to admit?

VAN ANDA

Because it's our job to tell the people what we know.

BIRCHALL

We don't know what we know! No source, no confirmation. Why are we rushing to print? Is being first with this story truly that important?

VAN ANDA

This is the game, Mr. Birchall. This is the way papers are made.

BIRCHALL

By slinging assumptions basely solely on your gut?

VAN ANDA

By printing the truth and printing it before anyone else.

BIRCHALL

We don't know what the truth is. We have a few facts, but we're nowhere near the truth.

VAN ANDA

And who said facts and truth are the same thing?

BIRCHALL

That's the entire business we're in. We have no idea that any of this is right and that's our entire job.

VAN ANDA
It's right.

BIRCHALL
You don't know that.

VAN ANDA
I do.

BIRCHALL
How?

VAN ANDA
I just do.

BIRCHALL
How do you know though? How can any of us know? This kind of thing--it doesn't happen anymore. Ships don't sink. We're beyond it and no distress call or wire report can convince me otherwise. I mean, this is the Titanic we're talking about here. We laid rails to the west, built buildings that touch the sky, and we launched *this* ship. And I won't believe she sank. I won't believe that we are any less than we were yesterday.

*

VAN ANDA
(beat)
Are you finished?

Birchall storms out of the room through the stairwell. The room settles.

WOOLLCOTT
A lunatic if ever I saw one.

VAN ANDA
He's a believer, that's all.

BRACKEN
He's right though. We can't run the story without a source.

VAN ANDA
We have a source. The wireless--

BRACKEN
I don't think--

PAINE
VA, are you sure about this?

VAN ANDA
Without a doubt.

PAINÉ

Tommy is right though, to use circumstantial evidence as the foundation for a story like this, it's unheard of.

VAN ANDA

Circumstantial evidence is all we have at the moment, gentlemen. The rest will come.

BRACKEN

I hate to side with Fred here, but we have plenty for the city edition--the ice warnings, the distress call, launching the lifeboats, even the loss of communication. Claiming she sank feels like a step too far.

VAN ANDA

What do you honestly think happened?

BRACKEN

I agree with you completely. The Titanic's wireless is out, in all likelihood, she's at the bottom of the ocean. But I don't understand why you won't wait for someone to tell us that before we print it. I don't want Miller, or even Ochs to-

VAN ANDA

Let me worry about Mr. Miller and Mr. Ochs. For now, we're running the story. We don't have any other options.

BRACKEN

The other options are our only options. You've been trying to build something here for years, we all have. And if we're not airtight on this story, the International Mercantile Marine, The Sun, the public, they'll pick us apart. It'll be a feeding frenzy and we'll lose it all--our credibility, our readership, our jobs--

PAINÉ

Miller will have a stroke, Ochs'll have you out on the street and the rest of us with you. We won't get a job reporting the weather.

BRACKEN

We go to print with this and we're wrong, no one will ever read The Times again--

VAN ANDA

I'm aware of the stakes, thank you.

PAINÉ

Then you know we can't run a story based solely on your instinct.

VAN ANDA

It isn't question instinct, it's a matter of vision.

BRACKEN

Whatever it is, it's something the rest of us lack--

VAN ANDA

You think I don't know that?

Birchall slips back into the room and stands in the doorway, unseen by the others.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

You're right, of course. All of you. I understand your reluctance, your hesitation, but if we follow logic, there's only one conclusion to be reached. I'm not asking you to believe this story, I'm simply asking you to believe me.

BIRCHALL

(beat)

It's true, isn't it? The story about Grant.

VAN ANDA

Every word.

BIRCHALL

Why in the dark?

VAN ANDA

Excuse me?

BIRCHALL

Tommy said you put the whole thing together in the dark. Why?

VAN ANDA

Keep the paper across the street off our trail.

(beat)

Not everyone can see in the dark.

BIRCHALL

(beat)

Let's go then.

VAN ANDA

I'm sorry?

BIRCHALL

You've got me.

PAINE

Me too.

And me. WOOLLCOTT

Alright. BRACKEN

Yeah. STEWART

Thank you, gentlemen. Now, let's put it together. VAN ANDA

Van Anda crosses to the chessboard and moves a piece as the lights shift. The staff return to their posts and continue working: Birchall typing, Paine and Woollcott working the phones, and Bracken combing through notes.

Van Anda crosses to center as a spot rises to meet him.

VAN ANDA
"Monday, April 15th, 1912."

Van Anda steps back into the darkness and exits as four spots rise across the stage. One by one, Birchall, Paine, Bracken, and Woollcott step into the light, a chorus delivering the news.

BRACKEN
"New Liner Titanic hits an iceberg..."

BIRCHALL
"...sinking by the bow at midnight..."

WOOLLCOTT
"...women put off in lifeboats..."

PAINE
"...last wireless at 12:27am blurred..."

The chorus stands silent a moment before returning to their posts. The lights shift again as dawn breaks through the office windows.

CHARLES MILLER, Editor-In-Chief, enters from the stairwell, carrying a briefcase and a copy of The Times. He has a stern look on his face and his stride parts those in his path. He slams the paper down on Paine's desk.

MILLER

Does someone want to tell me what the hell this is?

WOOLLCOTT

(without looking up)

An exceptional sample of journalistic prowess.

PAINE

(into phone)

I understand that, but what about second class?

MILLER

Where is he?

WOOLLCOTT

Make-up, I believe, although Managing Editor's keeper exceeds the purview of my responsibility.

PAINE

(into phone)

There has be a roster or a manifest of some sort.

BRACKEN

He was preparing type set for the next edition with O'Neill.

MILLER

The hell he is.

PAINE

(into phone)

VA wants a list of passengers.

MILLER

Someone tell me what you've all been doing the last twelve hours. Birchall?

BIRCHALL

(without looking up from his
typewriter)

I'm on deadline.

MILLER

No, stop. All of you.

PAINE

(into phone)

There were more than just titans of industry onboard, okay?

Birchall continues typing. Miller crosses to his desk and rips the paper from his typewriter. The room grinds to a halt.

PAINE

(into phone)
I'll call you back.

MILLER
I want to know what the hell is going on.

BRACKEN
The Titanic. She...well, she sank.

MILLER
And we have confirmation of this?

The room is silent.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Our source. What is our source?

Van Anda enters from the stairwell.

VAN ANDA
Mr. Paine, I need that passenger list.

MILLER
What source do we have that says the Titanic sank?

VAN ANDA
Good morning to you too, Mr. Miller.

PAINE

(handing notes)
First class so far, still working on second and third.

BRACKEN
Fifty-seven calls so far, VA. The Mayor's office, the Governor's office--

*

VAN ANDA
Has Mr. Soule checked in?

BRACKEN
He called from the White Star offices about twenty minutes ago, but nothing solid yet.

VAN ANDA
Let me know the minute he has something. Mr. Birchall, how quickly can you have that piece on the lifeboats?

BIRCHALL

(snatching the paper from
Miller's hands)

Two minutes.

MILLER

No. No. No. Nobody move. I'll ask again and for the last time, what source do we have that says the Titanic sank?

VAN ANDA

We have six bulletins from the Associated Press, detailing wireless correspondence from the Baltic, the Carpathia, and the Virginian, all of which received the Titanic's distress call.

MILLER

And these bulletins say the Titanic sank?

VAN ANDA

The sixth and final describes the abrupt ceasing of her wireless communication.

MILLER

Which means?

VAN ANDA

She sank.

MILLER

Did the bulletin say she sank?

VAN ANDA

I thought perhaps we might apply logic to the situation.

MILLER

Jesus Christ, did the bulletin say she sank?

VAN ANDA

It did not.

MILLER

And yet, you printed she sank in the morning edition.

VAN ANDA

That's incorrect.

MILLER

Excuse me?

VAN ANDA

We printed the distress call in the morning edition and the sinking in the city edition.

A telephone rings. Van Anda answers without breaking Miller's eye contact.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

(into phone)
Yes, Mr. O'Neill? Two minutes.

(hangs up the phone)
And we'll be printing it again in an extra edition.

MILLER
Are you outside your mind?

VAN ANDA
It's been suggested more than once.

MILLER
Aside from the wireless, was there anything to suggest the ship sank?

VAN ANDA
There's plenty to suggest the ship sank, otherwise we wouldn't have printed it on the front page of our newspaper.

MILLER
You know damn well what I mean. And this isn't *our* newspaper. It's Mr. Ochs' newspaper. That you could be so reckless.

VAN ANDA
Excuse me.

MILLER
Reporting without a source.

VAN ANDA
Her wireless is out, Mr. Miller. What else would you like?

MILLER
And before her wireless went out, did it miraculously broadcast from the bottom of the ocean? Because unless it send its final message from underwater, we don't have a story. We can't prove any of this with the information we have.

VAN ANDA
On the contrary--

MILLER
If the White Star Line refutes the story--

VAN ANDA
Based on what? What evidence do they have the Titanic is still afloat?

MILLER

You didn't think about the implications of this, did you? The panic it would create. I mean, the people on that ship--

VAN ANDA

We're all acquainted with her passengers, Mr. Miller.

MILLER

The market will be in a free-fall because we've just reported the head of every major department store, railroad, and shipping company between here and San Fransisco was lost at sea.

VAN ANDA

You can't chastise me for reporting the news, regardless of its implications.

MILLER

News you've conjured based on evidence that's circumstantial at best?

VAN ANDA

I connected the dots.

MILLER

We've had a great many conversations about making this paper stand out--

VAN ANDA

If Mr. Ochs wants this paper to stand out, this is the way it's done. By printing the news, printing it first--

MILLER

You know how I feel about the way you do things. And for the most part, we've found a compromise. But you've just made a serious mistake.

A telephone rings. Paine scrambles to answer it.

PAINE

New York Times, this is Jack Paine.

VAN ANDA

The staff and I have spent the better part of the last nine hours piecing this story together, bit by bit.

PAINE

(into the phone)

And may I ask what this is regarding?

MILLER

The fact remains, it was irresponsible and unbecoming of this organization to print a headline of this magnitude without confirmation.

PAINE

VA...

MILLER

Unless you have some unimpeachable source--some eyewitness account detailing how the Titanic foundered, we can't stand by this story.

VAN ANDA

What are you suggesting?

MILLER

Retraction.

VAN ANDA

You can't be serious.

MILLER

It's our best hope to save this paper's reputation.

VAN ANDA

No--

MILLER

Do you realize what you've done? The volume of jeopardy in which you've put our entire business?

VAN ANDA

I won't--

MILLER

We retract or you resign.

VAN ANDA

I don't think so--

MILLER

I don't know what you think you were doing--

VAN ANDA

I was reporting the news, goddammit!

PAINE

Mr. Van Anda.

VAN ANDA

What?

PAINÉ

I have Phillip Franklin from the White Star Line on the phone.

Van Anda and Miller remain locked in their staring contest, neither willing to blink.

VAN ANDA

Yes?

PAINÉ

They're refuting the story, sir.

VAN ANDA

Which part?

PAINÉ

All of it.

VAN ANDA

All of it?

PAINÉ

The Titanic didn't sink.

STEWART

Check.

Van Anda breaks away from Miller and turns to the chessboard, looking down at the pieces.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

In the dark, we hear the chatter of a typewriter. Lights rise on the same as before, an hour later.

Birchall is at his desk typing, a storm of concentration. Bracken is also fixed on his work, buried in a mountain of papers and books. Woollcott, once again, is slumped in his seat with his feet on his desk, reading a copy of The New York Sun. Stewart remains seated at the chessboard, yawning.

Paine enters from the stairwell.

PAINE

Fred, I need--

BIRCHALL

In a minute.

A beat as Birchall types.

PAINE

Fred, I--

BIRCHALL

In a minute.

Another beat. Birchall stops, but his gaze stays fixed on the typewriter. His mind reaches for his lost thought.

PAINE

You got it?

BIRCHALL

No, it's gone.

PAINE

Sorry.

BIRCHALL

Yeah. What do you need?

PAINE

O'Neill is holding the presses. Are we going or not?

BIRCHALL

Ask Miller.

Where is he?
PAINÉ

Still on the phone with Franklin.
BIRCHALL

What about VA?
PAINÉ

In with Miller.
BIRCHALL

Paine starts towards the Editor's office, but stops when he sees Woollcott reading The Sun.

Really?
PAINÉ (CONT'D)

What?
WOOLLCOTT

With everything going on right now, you're reading--
PAINÉ

Boning up on the competition, I told you.
WOOLLCOTT

Does this really seem like the time and place?
PAINÉ

This seems exactly like the time and place.
WOOLLCOTT

I thought you were working on a piece about the ice warnings.
PAINÉ

Finished and awaiting revision. Now, in the realm of more important matters, have you ever stopped to ponder why we keep the encyclopedias in this establishment on the highest shelf of the tallest bookcase?
WOOLLCOTT

What?
PAINÉ

I find the absence of practicality astounding.
WOOLLCOTT

This again?
BIRCHALL

WOOLLCOTT

For such heavy books that are consulted on such a consistent basis, keeping them in such a locations reeks of inefficiency, does it not?

PAINE

What's happening?

BRACKEN

Don't get him started.

WOOLLCOTT

Is a ladder or step-stool too much to ask, for Christsake? *

BIRCHALL

Too late.

PAINE

And why is this suddenly a complaint you have?

BIRCHALL

Anyone willing to bet he'd never used an encyclopedia before this morning?

WOOLLCOTT

Were I not the subject of this conversation, that's a bet I would take.

PAINE

I never thought I would say this, but instead of pissing and moaning, can you just go back to reading The Sun?

WOOLLCOTT

I can't. It's left me in a state of acute nausea. Listen...

(reading from paper)

"Throughout the morning, The White Star Line offices have been besieged by friends of passengers on the big liner who wanted definite information--"

BRACKEN

"The big liner?"

WOOLLCOTT

(reading)

"The telephones were kept busy with inquiries. To all the White Star officers extended assurance the vessel was still afloat and that the passengers were not in danger, despite sensationalized reports to the contrary."

BRACKEN

"Sensationalized?"

BIRCHALL

Who uses passive voice in their lead?

STEWART

My dog could write a better sentence.

PAINE

You fish that one out of a garbage can in Times Square too?

WOOLLCOTT

Not at all, I stole it.

PAINE

What about stooping to petty larceny?

WOOLLCOTT

I grew weary of sifting through the garbage cans in Times Square.

BIRCHALL

Garbage cans?

BRACKEN

More than one?

PAINE

Is sifting through garbage cans in Times Square a recurring item on your daily schedule?

WOOLLCOTT

Of course.

STEWART

You know, that might appear a bit odd to the uninformed observer.

BIRCHALL

Oh, don't worry, it appears odd to the informed observer too.

BRACKEN

And is there a particular reason you sift through the garbage cans in Times Square?

WOOLLCOTT

It's the most convenient place to acquire a copy of The New York Sun.

BIRCHALL

Of course it is.

BRACKEN

Naturally.

WOOLLCOTT

Please, their staff is compromised of hacks whose account of daily events resembles the shrieking of a fevered baboon.

STEWART

Hence sifting through the garbage.

WOOLLCOTT

Finally, someone understands. Mr. Stewart, I knew there was something I liked about you.

BRACKEN

(to Paine)

O'Neill is waiting on word about the next edition?

PAINE

It's on the typesetter, but he's proofing revisions for a second copy.

BIRCHALL

The phone lines still jammed?

PAINE

Yes.

BIRCHALL

How's Margaret doing?

PAINE

She's got a handle on it. I'm telling you, in all my time here, the only truly bad days are the ones when Margaret is out sick.

BRACKEN

Hold on, you said O'Neill is proofing a second copy?

PAINE

What of it?

BRACKEN

Why?

PAINE

You heard Miller, right?

WOOLLCOTT

They could hear him in Yonkers.

BRACKEN

They're seriously considering retraction.

PAINÉ

The VP of the White Star Line is claiming this morning's headline is a fabrication and you don't think we need to consider retracting?

BRACKEN

Not if they story's correct.

PAINÉ

And what if we got it wrong?

BIRCHALL

We didn't get it wrong.

WOOLLCOTT

Say what you will, wrong or right. We'll retract the story.

BIRCHALL

There's a man with faith in his reporting.

BRACKEN

You honestly believe that?

WOOLLCOTT

The five spot in my coat pocket says so.

BIRCHALL

Seriously?

WOOLLCOTT

Is no one in the gaming mood?

A beat.

PAINÉ

You're on.

BRACKEN

Weren't you just saying maybe we got it wrong?

PAINÉ

Maybe, but...I don't know. I'm anxious, that's all.

BIRCHALL

No surprise there.

PAINÉ

VA knows what he's doing.

WOOLLCOTT

Jack, if there's one I've learned, that man hasn't the faintest clue what he's doing.

Woollcott grins and shakes Paine's hand. Van Anda enters from the Editor's Office, chewing his cigar. He goes straight to the chessboard and inspects the pieces without a word. He reaches to move a piece, hesitates, then moves a different piece.

VAN ANDA
Mr. Bracken? *

BRACKEN
Sir? *

VAN ANDA
I'd like you to get in touch with a hotel on the waterfront in Chelsea. As close to the piers as you can find. *

BRACKEN
Of course, but-- I don't-- *

VAN ANDA
Just trust me, would you, Mr. Bracken? *

BRACKEN
But what for? What do we--? *

VAN ANDA
Leave it to me, Mr. Bracken. *

BRACKEN
Yes, sir. *

Bracken crosses to the book cases and removes a telephone directory from one of the shelves. He begins to sift through the pages. *

VAN ANDA
(picking up Woollcott's copy of
The Sun)
What's the word from Park Row, Mr. Woollcott? *

WOOLLCOTT
The same as every other godforsaken rag that dares to call itself a newspaper. Collision, damage, unsinkable. *

VAN ANDA
And?

WOOLLCOTT
Some rather scathing commentary on our reporting thus far.

BIRCHALL

They felt it lacked professionalism and integrity.

VAN ANDA

What do they say about casting the first stone? *

STEWART

Something about those without sin?

VAN ANDA

Very good, Mr. Stewart. Now, Mr. Woollcott, if you wouldn't mind paying Mr. Fairbanks a visit, I'd like an update on the wireless.

WOOLLCOTT

With pleasure.

Woollcott exits through the stairwell.

VAN ANDA

On second thought, Mr. Paine, I'd like you to accompany him. I have the strangest sense the two of them together could very quickly devolve into a game of cards. *

PAINE

An astute observation.

Paine follows Woollcott and exits through the stairwell. Bracken picks up the telephone on his desk. *

BRACKEN *

(into phone) *

Margaret, would you connect me with the Strand Hotel at Eleventh and Fourteenth please? *

BIRCHALL

What's Miller saying?

VAN ANDA

You heard him.

BIRCHALL

Has there been any word?

BRACKEN

Yes, this is Tommy Bracken calling from the New York Times. *

VAN ANDA

Too soon to tell.

BIRCHALL

Are we retracting?

BRACKEN

(into phone)

I have Carr Van Anda, our Managing Editor here... Yes, just a moment.

(to Van Anda)

The Strand Hotel on Fourteenth for you.

VAN ANDA

Thank you, Mr. Bracken.

(crossing to Bracken and taking the phone)

Yes, this is Carr Van Anda. I'd like to make a reservation for Tuesday evening... Yes... What do you have available?...How many rooms?... Sixteen? Yes, that'll do nicely... That's correct, sir. I'd like to book the twelfth floor...Yes, the entire twelfth floor...

BIRCHALL

What the hell's he doing?

Bracken shrugs.

VAN ANDA

(into phone)

Yes, you can list it under the Times...The New York Times... No, it's the name of the paper...Van Anda. Yours?... Well Mr. Carter, once you've spoken to the manager, I'd appreciate a call back... Hello? Hello?

(hangs up the phone)

It's true what they say. Good help is hard to find.

BIRCHALL

Um, VA?

VAN ANDA

Something I can do for you, Mr. Birchall?

BIRCHALL

What the hell was that?

VAN ANDA

An unsuccessful attempt to secure us footing at the docks.

BIRCHALL

The docks?

VAN ANDA

The Titanic's passengers are going to arrive somewhere. And I'd like us ready when they do.

BIRCHALL *
Aren't we-- Isn't that perhaps a bit premature? *

Van Anda crosses to the chessboard and *
moves a piece. Stewart whimpers. *

VAN ANDA *
Simply playing the game, Mr. Birchall. Now, where were we? *

MILLER (OFF STAGE)
SON OF A BITCH!

VAN ANDA
Ah, yes...

Miller charges into the room from the
office.

MILLER
Morgan Jr. is there. At the White Star Line. Franklin is
taking orders from him.

BIRCHALL
JP Morgan Junior?

MILLER
It seems Mr. Morgan now views this paper as the primary
obstacle between him and monopolizing the transatlantic
shipping trade.

VAN ANDA
We'll wait them out.

MILLER
Wait them out?

VAN ANDA
They'll back down as soon as the communication catches up to
our reporting.

MILLER
Catches up to our reporting? Do you hear yourself?

VAN ANDA
Once we verify the Titanic sank--

MILLER
Carr, we won't be able to verify the Titanic sank because it
didn't. We're all entitled to mistakes, but this--

VAN ANDA
You think this was a mistake.

MILLER

Unless it wasn't.

VAN ANDA

You're suggesting I would intentionally fabricate the news for the sake of selling papers?

MILLER

Even Hearst was once an idealist.

(beat)

And it's naive to think this exact conversation isn't being had at the White Star Line this very moment.

Paine appears in the doorway, clutching a wire report.

VAN ANDA

They have no grounds to act on their threat. No legal precedent.

MILLER

Even so, what's to stop JP Morgan from buying us, then dismantling this organization piece by piece? Worse yet, instructing us what to write and how to write it.

VAN ANDA

The largest ship in his fleet just sank. He's going to be otherwise occupied.

MILLER

She didn't sink.

VAN ANDA

Look past the facts, Charles. Look at what they say.

MILLER

The facts are all we have. We're in the business of facts.

VAN ANDA

We're in the business of truth.

MILLER

The facts are the quickest route to the truth.

VAN ANDA

The truth lies between the facts and anyone with an eye on the world know that.

MILLER

Carr, believe me, no one sees the world the way you do.

A beat.

PAINÉ
I'm sorry to interrupt, but--

VAN ANDA
Yes?

Paine hands Van Anda a wireless
bulletin. Van Anda reads.

MILLER
Let me guess, more good news.

Van Anda hands the paper to Miller, who
reads.

MILLER (CONT'D)
What did I tell you?

VAN ANDA
Mr. Paine, have Mr. Fairbanks get in touch with Cape Race.

MILLER
What the hell are you doing?

VAN ANDA
(to Paine)
Ask them if they've received any word from the Titanic and
the Titanic alone. A continued distress call, dialogue with
other ships, anything.

PAINÉ
Right away, sir.

Paine moves to exit.

MILLER
You receive word the Titanic is being towed to port and
you're going to ignore it?

VAN ANDA
Mr. Paine, before you go--

Paine turns around.

PAINÉ
Sir?

VAN ANDA
I'd like your opinion on this report.

PAINÉ
I don't understand--

VAN ANDA
I presume you read it.

PAINE
Yes, sir.

VAN ANDA
Do you believe it to be accurate?

PAINE
(beat)
I don't.

MILLER
Oh, for Christsake.

VAN ANDA
Tell me why.

PAINE
Well, my understanding is rather basic, but the operators at Cape Race are picking up numerous signals at once. There's a whole lot of chatter, making it nearly impossible to distinguish between messages.

MILLER
You're claiming the men passing these messages are incompetent?

PAINE
No, no, not at all. It's not a matter of competence, more difficulty of circumstance. It'd be like standing in Penn Station with a thousand people talking at once and trying to pick out a whisper across the room.

VAN ANDA
In layman's terms, there's a decent chance this report is a mix of messages from various ships in the area.

PAINE
That's my best guess, sir.

MILLER
Your best guess.

PAINE
The wireless isn't foolproof technology. Marconi is still perfecting it.

MILLER
Didn't he win a Nobel Prize for it?

PAINE

(shrugs)

Doesn't mean he isn't still working out the kinks.

MILLER

True or false: I could send Stalwart to stand on the pier in New York Harbor with a pair of binoculars and be as informed as I am right now.

STEWART

My name is Stewart.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Paine, is there a way to tell if Cape Race is picking up half the Virginian's signal and half the Baltic's?

PAINE

No.

VAN ANDA

Is there no way to confirm the accuracy of reports such as this one?

PAINE

No.

MILLER

Alright, fine. I'll play along. Let's say these reports we're getting aren't reliable. Who's to say the Titanic's distress call wasn't just a series of mixed signals?

PAINE

The airwaves were quiet at the time of the accident. And multiple ships confirmed receiving the message. There's only been a substantial increase in wireless transmissions since then.

BRACKEN

That and her telegraph system is more powerful than most. She has a stronger signal.

MILLER

You're saying her brand new state-of-the-art radio is up to snuff, but the watertight compartments weren't enough to keep her afloat?

BRACKEN

Something like that, yes, sir.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Paine, see what you and Mr. Fairbanks can learn from Cape Race.

PAINE

Yes, sir.

Paine rushes out of the room through the stairwell.

MILLER

We're still retracting.

VAN ANDA

You know we can't do that.

MILLER

This story of yours is a time bomb. For every hour it sits beneath our masthead, we further tarnish our reputation.

BRACKEN

And what about the wireless? The mixed signals?

MILLER

All I know is I have a source in my hand that's on record saying the Titanic is being towed to port. That's the best information I have and that's what we're running.

VAN ANDA

Give us a few hours.

MILLER

I'm not subjecting this paper to any further negligence.

VAN ANDA

A few hours, that's all I'm asking. At least give us the chance to prove ourselves correct.

(beat)

Think of the numbers. Circulation will go through the roof. If I'm right, this is the biggest story so far this century. And we're the only ones who have it.

MILLER

And if you're wrong?

VAN ANDA

I'm not.

MILLER

(beat)

You've been doing this as long as I have, Carr. Your methods are...let's say, unorthodox. And thus far, your results have been beyond question.

(beat)

MILLER (CONT'D)

But make no mistake, your success is the only reason Mr. Ochs has entertained your pleasantries. You haven't the footing for a single misstep.

(beat)

Two hours. That's all.

VAN ANDA

Thank you, Mr. Miller.

Miller tears down the hallway and vanishes into one of the offices, leaving everyone left in the room to heave a collective sigh of relief.

Van Anda crosses and examines the chessboard. A telephone rings and Bracken answers.

BRACKEN

(into phone)

New York Times, Managing Editor's Office...Yeah, just a minute, Percy. I'll put you through.

(to Van Anda)

VA, Percy Soule for you.

VAN ANDA

Have Margaret transfer it to the line in my office.

BRACKEN

(into phone)

He'll be right with you.

Van Anda crosses into his office, where lights right to meet him. He picks up the phone on his desk.

VAN ANDA

(into phone)

Mr. Soule, what's the good word?...I see...No, we've been in touch with Franklin's office here, but nothing so far...And your source in the press office doesn't have anything?...Alright...no, the well's run dry.

Birchall slips into Van Anda's office.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

What about the telegraph station in Wanamaker's?...Top Floor...They're Marconi's men, they'll have it before anyone else...Of course. Thank you, Mr. Soule.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

(hanging up the phone)

Something I can do for you, Mr. Birchall?

BIRCHALL

Where are we? What now?

VAN ANDA

We wait.

BIRCHALL

That's it. Just wait?

VAN ANDA

That's it.

BIRCHALL

And what good is waiting going to do?

VAN ANDA

We can't confirm our story until we hear from Cape Race. It's a waiting game from here on out.

BIRCHALL

Why is O'Neill downstairs proofing two copies of the evening edition?

VAN ANDA

I think you know the answer to that.

BIRCHALL

Are we retracting?

VAN ANDA

No.

BIRCHALL

It certainly looks that way.

VAN ANDA

The reservation at a hotel across from the docks gave it away, right?

*
*

BIRCHALL

You and I both know whether we're right or wrong, the next part of this story is going to pull into the harbor and anchor across from that hotel. Maybe it's the Titanic, maybe it's a rescue ship with her passengers. Don't pretend that grand next move of yours wasn't safe.

*
*
*
*
*

VAN ANDA

We aren't retracting, Mr. Birchall.

*

BIRCHALL

Then why two copies?

VAN ANDA

Fred, I can assure you, despite appearances, I have no intention of capitulating to Mr. Miller's whims.

BIRCHALL

You're hedging your bet.

VAN ANDA

Keeping Mr. O'Neill occupied keeps Mr. Miller off our backs for the moment. And I for one would very much like to enjoy that luxury as long as possible.

A telephone rings in the newsroom.
Bracken answers.

BRACKEN

(into phone)

New York Times, Managing Editor's Office.

VAN ANDA

This thing ends when the ink hits the page.

BIRCHALL

Do you believe this story or not?

VAN ANDA

I do.

BIRCHALL

Then act like it.

BRACKEN

(into phone)

Just a moment.

(calling out)

VA, I have the Strand Hotel for you.

*

VAN ANDA

About time...

*

Van Anda crosses back into the newsroom and takes the phone from Bracken.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Yes, hello, this is Carr Van Anda...I called earlier to make a reservation...Tuesday evening...Sixteen rooms...That's correct...The entire twelfth floor...My understand was it was available...Yes, I'd like to book the entire floor...My staff is at work on a story and I'm going to need a place for them to work...Believe it or not, our offices here won't suffice, which is why I'd like to book a floor at your hotel...Well, I'm sorry to say it, but I'm not the least bit interested in how things are usually done... The proprietor, you say? You do that... Yes, I'll expect a call back. Thank you.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

Van Anda hangs up the phone as
Woollcott enters.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Incompetence truly is an all consuming fire.

*

WOOLLCOTT

VA.

VAN ANDA

Word from Cape Race? Already?

WOOLLCOTT

No, it's--

Woollcott offers a piece of paper. Van
Anda takes it and reads. Birchall and
Bracken cross and read as well.

VAN ANDA

Just now?

WOOLLCOTT

That's correct.

BIRCHALL

Jesus.

BRACKEN

It's over.

Van Anda wads up the paper and stuffs
it in his pocket.

VAN ANDA

Keep it to yourselves.

BIRCHALL

What?

VAN ANDA

You heard me.

BRACKEN

What the hell are you doing?

VAN ANDA

You said it yourself, if Miller gets wind of this--

WOOLLCOTT

Something about this lacks the feel of professional integrity.

BRACKEN

I understand discounting the first wireless report, but this is double confirmation.

BIRCHALL

Tommy's right. This confirms it. And we can't just pick some facts and ignore others.

VAN ANDA

The last report, relayed from the Virginian through Cape Race, indicated the Titanic was being towed to Halifax. Now the Carpathia is saying the Virginian is towing the Titanic to New York and the Parisian has her passengers. I don't call that confirmation of anything.

BIRCHALL

They're towing the Titanic to port. You've got two sources that say so.

VAN ANDA

You all heard Mr. Paine. With the melding of wireless signals, what are the odds this is true? Tell me.

BRACKEN

Even so, we need to at least give it consideration.

VAN ANDA

Do you want to retract?

BRACKEN

Of course not, but--

VAN ANDA

Do you believe this story? Do you think the Titanic sank?

BRACKEN

You know I do.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Birchall?

Birchall nods.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Mr. Woollcott?

WOOLLCOTT

With each passing minute, it gets more and more difficult.

VAN ANDA

The thing that are most difficult to believe are usually the things worth believing.

Van Anda crosses to the chessboard and moves a piece. Bracken and Woollcott return to their desks.

BIRCHALL

Do you know what you're doing?

VAN ANDA

Are you sure that's a question you want me to answer?

(beat)

Mr. Woollcott.

BIRCHALL

Mr. VA.

VAN ANDA

Has there been anything further on the ice warnings?

Woollcott tears a piece of paper from his typewriter and hands it to Van Anda, who reads and makes notes with a pencil.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

This is all?

BRACKEN

Here we go...

WOOLLCOTT

Crafted with all the resources available at my immediate disposal...

VAN ANDA

Yet lacking basic contextual information.

WOOLLCOTT

...apart from the encyclopedias, of course. You see...

VAN ANDA

What about the encyclopedias, Mr. Woollcott?

WOOLLCOTT

Well, they're...um...

VAN ANDA

Yes?

WOOLLCOTT

I can't--uh...they're, um...they're too high to reach.

VAN ANDA

Too high to reach?

WOOLLCOTT

That's right. Top shelf and all.

Van Anda looks at the bookshelf, then back at Woollcott.

VAN ANDA

(seething)

Mr. Woollcott, despite popular belief, it wasn't your charm, good looks, or blatant nepotism that secured your position in this organization. It was your intellect. An intellect I assume possesses the necessary problem solving skills to acquire an item from the highest shelf of a bookcase.

WOOLLCOTT

(beat)

Yes, sir.

VAN ANDA

I want a rewrite on my desk in twenty minutes.

(beat)

And when you're finished, I recommend you read the works of Horace Greeley and learn how unfitted you are for your chosen profession.

Van Anda turns and exits into the Editor's Office, the door slamming behind him. Woollcott is silent.

BIRCHALL

He didn't mean that.

WOOLLCOTT

Of course not.

BRACKEN

I've never seen him like this.

STEWART

Like what?

BIRCHALL

(startled)

Jesus, kid. Almost forgot you were there.

STEWART

Never seen him like what?

BRACKEN

Rattled. I mean, for him to just sit on a bulletin like that?

BIRCHALL

You said it, Alex. Lacks some kind of professional something.

WOOLLCOTT

Ah yes, my words exactly.

BRACKEN

VA's never been one to do it by the book, but something about this feels...I don't know.

WOOLLCOTT

If the tenants of this business were penal laws, he'd have a wrap sheet a mile long.

BIRCHALL

He's hardly Hearst.

WOOLLCOTT

He's unhinged.

BIRCHALL

He believes it.

WOOLLCOTT

You didn't.

BIRCHALL

Changing your mind doesn't make you stupid, Alex. Quite the opposite.

Paine rushes into the room.

PAINE

Where's VA?

BRACKEN

His office. Why?

PAINE

(rushing into the Editor's
Office)

We've got Cape Race.

Paine disappears for a moment, then
returns, followed by Van Anda, reading
a slip of paper from the wireless room.

VAN ANDA

Margaret has him, correct?

PAINE

That's right.

VAN ANDA

Alright, tell her to keep him on the line.

PAINE

But--

VAN ANDA

Do it.

Paine picks up a telephone.

PAINE

(into phone)

Margaret, VA wants you to keep Cape Race on hold...That's
right.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Bracken, we're going to need the offices of the Allan
Line in Montreal. Would you be so kind?

Bracken picks up the phone.

BRACKEN

(into phone)

Margaret, can you get me the Allan Line?...Yes, Montreal,
that's right. Thank you.

(to Van Anda)

What am I saying?

VAN ANDA

(pulling wadded up wire report
from his pocket)

Ask them about that.

BRACKEN

But I thought--

VAN ANDA

If they confirm it, we'll report it.

(to Birchall)

I need you to get in touch with Halifax.

BRACKEN

(into phone)

This is Tommy Bracken. I'm calling from The New York Times regarding a wireless bulletin we've just received.

*

BIRCHALL

(taking the bulletin from
Bracken)

I assume...?

VAN ANDA

Yes.

BRACKEN

(into phone)

Yes, the report reads that the Titanic is being towed into port by your ship, the Virginian.

BIRCHALL

(into phone)

Margaret, I need the shore station in Halifax...Of course.

Woolcott, without anything else to do,
begins to scour the room in search of
something to assist in reaching the
bookshelf.

VAN ANDA

Have her connect you to Cape Race.

PAINE

Me?

VAN ANDA

You.

PAINE

Why me? What do I say?

VAN ANDA

I'll talk you though it.

BRACKEN

(into phone)
I'm calling to confirm this. Has there been any recent contact with the Virginian?

PAINE
This is outside the scope of my responsibility.

VAN ANDA
Pick up the phone, Jack.

Paine picks up the phone.

PAINE
(into phone)
Margaret?

Paine holds the phone away from his ear.

PAINE (CONT'D)
(to Van Anda)
I think we broke her.

(into phone)
No, no, the ship Margaret. Not you.

BIRCHALL
(into phone)
Hello, Frederick Birchall with the New York Times. I'm calling to see if there's been any recent correspondence with the Virginian.

PAINE
(into phone)
Can you get me Cape Race, please? He was holding.

BIRCHALL
(into phone)
Have there been any reports regarding her towing the Titanic to port there?

VAN ANDA
(to Paine)
Now, once you have him, ask if there's been any further communication with the Titanic.

That's all?
PAINE

That's all.
VAN ANDA

Woolcott spots Paine's empty chair and takes it. He crosses upstage to the bookshelf, climbs atop the chair, and begins to leaf through encyclopedias.

BRACKEN

(into phone)
Yes, yes. Thank you very much for your time.

(hanging up)
No word from the Virginian in Montreal. They have no knowledge of the report.

PAINE

(into phone)
Yes, hello. This is Jack Paine with the New York Times. With whom am I speaking?

BIRCHALL

(into phone)
And no word about her docking in the harbor there?

PAINE

(into phone)
Mr. Goodwin, of course. I'm calling to inquire about the Titanic's wireless correspondence, actually...

BIRCHALL

(into phone)
No, no. I understand...Yes, thank you.

(hanging up)
Halifax hasn't heard anything either.

PAINE

(into phone)
My understanding is there hasn't been any word from her since the distress call cut out. Is that right?

Van Anda picks up a phone

VAN ANDA

(into phone)
Margaret, would you get me the office of the White Star Line,
please? I need to speak with Phillip Franklin.

He holds the phone away from his ear.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)
Remind me to send Margaret some flowers.

(into phone)
Thank you.

PAINE

(into phone)
No, that's all I needed...Yes, thank you...You too.

VAN ANDA

(into phone)
Carr Van Anda for Mr. Franklin, please...Thank you.

PAINE

(hanging up)
No one's heard anything from the Titanic. Not Cape Race or
any ship in the area.

VAN ANDA

(into phone)
Mr. Franklin, yes. Hello...

The rooms falls still and silent.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

(into phone)
Well, and yourself?...Ah, yes. That's why I'm calling...No,
not yet. But I am seeking confirmation of something. I've
just been in touch with the offices of the Allan
Line...That's right...Seems they haven't received word from
the Virginian. Neither has the port at Halifax...You're
right, certainly possible, but I contacted Cape Race as
well...Seems there hasn't been word from the Titanic since
her distress call went out...I'm not playing at anything, Mr.
Franklin. I'm only trying to decipher what's happening...No,
it's not...Let me assure you, Mr. Franklin, my staff are
among the most intelligent men in the world--

Paine sits, only to find his chair missing as he falls to the floor with a momentous THUD. From his perch at the bookshelf, Woollcott turns around. The men all stare at Paine, whose face displays a magnificent lack of surprise.

PAINE

Alex.

WOOLLCOTT

Yes?

PAINE

Might I have my chair back?

WOOLLCOTT

In a minute.

VAN ANDA

(into phone)

Hm? Oh, nothing...the ghost of Horace Greeley...Regardless, there hasn't been word from the Titanic since her distress call was interrupted. What other conclusion is there to be reached?

A long pause.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

You don't say...Of course not...Yes...Thank you for your time.

Van Anda hangs up the phone.

BRACKEN

Well?

VAN ANDA

We've got it.

BIRCHALL

You're serious.

VAN ANDA

Deep background. No word from the Titanic in the last twelve hours. We have a story, gentlemen.

An air of celebration ignites in the room. Van Anda Birchall, Paine and Bracken all shakes hands and exchange congratulations.

Woollcott replaces the chair at Paine's desk and joins the revelry.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Have Mr. O'Neill kill the second copy. We're only going to need the one.

BRACKEN

Yes, sir.

Bracken picks up the phone.

PAINE

You at least get your goddamn encyclopedia?

WOOLLCOTT

Yes, right here.

BRACKEN (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Make-up please, Margaret.

VAN ANDA

Alright, gentlemen, we're putting together comprehensive coverage. Mr. Woollcott, you continue with the ice warnings. Mr. Paine, wireless operation and maritime procedure. Mr. Birchall, I need eight-hundred words for the lead.

BRACKEN

(into phone)

John, it's Tommy. We're killing the second copy...

VAN ANDA

If we're quick we can get an extra edition out before deadline for the final evening edition. We have twenty minutes, understood?

PAINE/BIRCHALL/WOOLLCOTT

(collective acknowledgment)

The men return to their desks and begin work with an added sense of purpose and enthusiasm. Typewriters clack and chime. Van Anda crosses to the chessboard, where Stewart is still seated.

VAN ANDA

Where are we, Mr. Stewart?

STEWART

It's your move, sir.

WOOLLCOTT

Is Newfoundland one word or two?

PAINE

One word. Why?

BRACKEN

(into phone)

No, the retraction...wait...

WOOLLCOTT

Well...hm...wrong volume.

Woollcott sets the encyclopedia down on his desk and smiles at Paine.

WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

Might I borrow your--?

PAINE

No!

BRACKEN

(into phone)

Wait a minute--

(to others)

Quiet, all of you!

(into phone)

One more time, John...What did he say?...No, hold on.

(to Van Anda)

O'Neill's setting the retraction on the typesetter now.

VAN ANDA

Tell him to take it off, dammit.

BRACKEN

He says it's been proofed already.

VAN ANDA

By whom?

BRACKEN

Miller.

Van Anda seizes the phone from Bracken.

VAN ANDA

(into phone)

Mr. O'Neill? Clear the typesetter. No, that's not...I don't care what he said. Clear it!

Miller enters from the hallway, his hands in his pockets. The room slows to a halt.

MILLER

Put the phone down, Carr.

VAN ANDA

(into phone)

Dammit, you've got it backwards. We have it. We have confirmation.

MILLER

That's enough.

VAN ANDA

She went down. She sank.

MILLER

It's over, Carr.

VAN ANDA

(beat, then into phone)

I'll have to call you back, Mr. O'Neill.

Van Anda hangs up the phone.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Charles, we have it.

MILLER

I don't think so.

VAN ANDA

The White Star Line confirmed it.

MILLER

On the record?

VAN ANDA

Deep background.

MILLER

Did Franklin say the words? Did he say, "The Titanic sank?"

VAN ANDA

"We don't know what's happening."

MILLER

Doesn't sound like confirmation to me. Especially after Jonathan Palm from the Associated Press called to confirm we'd received a bulletin stating the Virginian is towing the Titanic to New York.

(beat)

Did we receive such a report?

VAN ANDA

(beat)

No.

MILLER

You were never a good liar, Carr.

VAN ANDA

Wasn't ever my calling.

MILLER

Suppose we ask the staff then. After all, a general is nothing without his men. Did anyone receive such a report from the AP this afternoon? Anyone?

The room is silent. No one looks at Miller.

MILLER (CONT'D)

No one? Hm, interesting.

VAN ANDA

Leave them out of this. They're simply following my instructions.

MILLER

Your instructions?

VAN ANDA

Charles, Halifax doesn't know anything about this and neither does the Allan Line. It's a false report.

MILLER

Like the others?

VAN ANDA

That's correct.

MILLER

I beg to differ. Mr. Woollcott, is it?

WOOLLCOTT

So they call me.

MILLER

It's my understanding you're quite the card player.

WOOLLCOTT

I see my reputation has preceded me.

MILLER

Now tell me, when you're at the table, how do you decide when to raise and when to fold?

WOOLLCOTT

I suppose you'd say it's a matter of playing the odds.

MILLER

Interesting. You believe this story, Woollcott?

WOOLLCOTT

What? That the Titanic sank?

MILLER

That's right.

WOOLLCOTT

An unsinkable ship that sinks.

BRACKEN

Practically unsinkable.

MILLER

What's the difference?

BRACKEN

Docking in New York Harbor versus settling into the North Atlantic seafloor.

MILLER

You believe it, Woollcott?

WOOLLCOTT

I suppose I do, yes.

MILLER

Why?

WOOLLCOTT

Seems logical enough, what with the distress call cutting out and all.

MILLER

Which I understand to be your area of expertise, is that right, Paine?

PAINE

Yes, sir.

MILLER

And the abrupt loss of the Titanic's wireless communication was enough to convince you she'd gone down?

PAINE

Why else would the signal stop?

MILLER

The same reason we lost contact with the Virginian perhaps?

PAINE

The Virginian wasn't in the middle of calling CQD.

MILLER

But shouldn't we also assume the worse about the Virginian, what without the means to contact her?

PAINE

She's out of reach of the shore stations, that's all.

MILLER

And who's to say we didn't lose the Titanic because she's out of reach of the shore stations?

PAINE

The Titanic's wireless signal is substantially more powerful.

MILLER

And electrical failure is impossible?

BRACKEN

She's have to be taking on water for the dynamos to fail so catastrophically. Enough water that she'd almost certainly go down.

MILLER

Almost certainly.

PAINE

(shrugging)

Impossible to say for sure.

MILLER

Hm. Amazing, isn't it, how quickly the fanatic's faith crumbles into doubt?

Paine is silent.

MILLER (CONT'D)

What about you, Bracken? What made a believer out of you?

BRACKEN

Her safety measures are hardly foolproof.

*

MILLER

The White Star Line designed her to be unsinkable.

BRACKEN

Which doesn't actually make her unsinkable.

MILLER

Ah, forgive me. "Practically unsinkable," was it?

BRACKEN

Yes, sir.

MILLER

And what, would you say, are the chances she sinks?

BRACKEN

Without knowing the extent of the damage, I couldn't possibly-

MILLER

Go ahead. Try.

BRACKEN

Well, the compartments were built to hold water, but she'd only stay afloat with a varying combination of them filled.

MILLER

How many compartments?

BRACKEN

I...I don't...

MILLER

Take a guess.

BRACKEN

I'm hardly a marine engineer.

MILLER

I'm sorry, one more time?

BRACKEN

I said, I'm hardly a mariner engineer.

MILLER

And yet we have you making such spectacular assessments for the sake of our readership. Might I recommend pulling your nose out of the books from time to time? There's a whole world out there you're missing.

(beat)

How about you, Fred. You buy this crap?

Birchall stares Miller down.

MILLER (CONT'D)

You think the Titanic sank?

BIRCHALL

I do.

MILLER

Tell me why.

BIRCHALL

(pointing to Van Anda)

Because he says so.

MILLER

Doesn't seem anyone is playing the odds tonight, Mr. Woollcott.

(beat)

Gents, we're in the business of what we can say for sure. This isn't fortune telling. We have to have the facts before we print them. And facts, gentlemen, leave no room for doubt. That's the way this game is played. I'm not sure how Van Anda here managed to convince you otherwise, but as of yet, there is no definitive word on the Titanic. We're running a retraction and an apology to the White Star Line, the families of the passengers, and the public, signed by the entire editorial staff. That's not a request, it's an order. Any questions?

The room is silent.

MILLER (CONT'D)

I didn't think so.

VAN ANDA

Charles--

MILLER

We're fixing this. Now.

VAN ANDA

You won't get Ochs' approval on this.

MILLER

We've already discussed it. The apology will need your signature, alongside his.

VAN ANDA

And if I refuse to sign?

MILLER

Then you take a seat in the stands and read the news as it's reported, like everyone else. *

(beat)

It's over, Carr.

Van Anda takes a breath, then crosses to the nearest telephone.

VAN ANDA

(into phone)

Make-up please, Margaret. Thank you.

(beat)

Mr. O'Neill, we'll have revisions and editorial approval on Mr. Miller's apology down to you within the hour...Yes, thank you.

Van Anda hangs up the phone. A long pause.

MILLER

You did the right thing.

Miller strides out of the room.

VAN ANDA

Let's get to work.

BRACKEN

What do you think you're doing?

VAN ANDA

What does it look like?

PAINE

You can't.

VAN ANDA

We ran a breaking headline without a source.

BRACKEN

But we have it.

VAN ANDA

And we can't stand by it.

PAINE

What happened to waiting them out?

WOOLLCOTT

You said it yourself, Franklin doesn't know--

VAN ANDA

And neither do we.

PAINE

Why are you doing this?

BIRCHALL

He's afraid.

VAN ANDA

I'm not.

BIRCHALL

Please. You've got fear stuck to you like you stepped in it.

VAN ANDA

I'm not afraid.

BIRCHALL

This whole story hinges on your word. You led us here and now you want to bail out because you know where it ends.

VAN ANDA

This has nothing to do with me.

BIRCHALL

It has everything to do with you. You can't stand the thought of losing your soapbox, your pulpit.

VAN ANDA

I'd hardly call this paper a soapbox.

BIRCHALL

You're single handedly responsible for everything we print. Doesn't matter that it's Ochs paper. Those of us standing here know who's running the show.

VAN ANDA

I assure you, Mr. Birchall, this newspaper is far more than one man. And unless we issue Mr. Miller's apology, every other paper in town will pick us apart.

BIRCHALL

So what?

VAN ANDA

We'll lose readership, circulation. No one will believe us.

(beat)

Telling the truth in a sea of deceit only makes you look like a liar.

BIRCHALL

What's the point of having a pulpit if you let someone put words in your mouth?

VAN ANDA

You think that's what this is?

BIRCHALL

That's exactly what this is. And it isn't Miller, it's Morgan. He's the one yanking the strings.

VAN ANDA

I fail to see Mr. Morgan's influence in this room.

BIRCHALL

You were so scared he'd sink his teeth into this paper and tell us what to write. He hasn't come within a mile or dropped a dime from his pocket and he's gotten to you.

(beat)

This story--it's not about lifeboats or telegraphs or watertight compartments. This is a story that asks the hardest question of all: are we all that we say we are? And those out there holding the strings want to stand on the rooftops and scream until their lungs give out. They want us all to say that we're everything and more. But you, you know better, don't you?

VAN ANDA

Try telling that to the masses.

BIRCHALL

All these years and you still don't get it. People know the truth when they see it. Some of them shrink away from it, other have to squint as they look, but they all know it when they see it.

(beat)

They'll come around. I did.

VAN ANDA

If we retract, we get to do the news tomorrow.

BIRCHALL

If we retract, what's the point of doing the news tomorrow?

(beat)

You want an apology, write it yourself.

Birchall exits through the stairwell. One by one, the rest of the staff follows his lead: first Bracken, then Woollcott, then Paine, who turns back to Van Anda a moment, then exits.

The room is empty, apart from Van Anda and Stewart, who's dutifully stuck to the chessboard. Van Anda takes the seat across from him for the first time.

STEWART

Is it always like this?

VAN ANDA

More or less.

(beat)

Have you heard the story of Icarus?

STEWART

Of course. Why?

VAN ANDA

Seemed appropriate.

STEWART

Why's that?

VAN ANDA

Hubris. That's all.

STEWART

You mean convincing ourselves we built an unsinkable ship.

VAN ANDA

Something like that.

STEWART

Can I ask you something?

VAN ANDA

By all means.

STEWART

Mr. Paine said something earlier I've been wondering about. He said you've never taken a byline on a story.

VAN ANDA

How is it they hear these things?

STEWART

Is it true?

VAN ANDA

That one, yes. But rest assured, Mr. Stewart. I've never fired a copy boy for winning a game of chess.

STEWART

The byline though. Why?

VAN ANDA

Why what?

STEWART

Why not take one?

VAN ANDA

Grant's death changed it all. You break a story like that and they shake your hand, slap you on the back, offer congratulations, but no one can look you in the eye. They can't quite meet your gaze, almost like they're afraid to. And after that, they expect you to have the answers, they expect you to know.

(beat)

And because you can see the pieces on the board and how they move, you think you do. But that also means you're a little further away each time you speak. They hoist you higher and higher until you're so sure at any moment, you'll hit your head on heaven's floorboards.

(beat)

Keeping your name out of print keeps your feet closer to the ground.

STEWART

That's how you knew.

VAN ANDA

I'm sorry?

STEWART

The Titanic. You never believed it was unsinkable, did you?

VAN ANDA

Arrogance is never unsinkable, Mr. Stewart. To think we aren't stumbling around in the dark like everyone else, that's like--

STEWART

Flying too close to the sun?

VAN ANDA

Like flying too close to the sun.

Van Anda knocks over his king on the chessboard.

STEWART

I never liked that story.

(beat)

Yes, there's a lesson about hubris in there somewhere, but it seems like every time I hear it, I'm being told to stay put.

STEWART (CONT'D)

To sit down, to stop reaching.

(beat)

Miller was right. No one sees the world the way you do, but that doesn't mean they don't want to. It doesn't mean they can't learn how.

VAN ANDA

Awfully hard to show someone the world when they can't look you in the eye.

STEWART

It's not that they can't, they don't know how. But they're trying.

(beat)

This story, every single one of them pushed back, then fell in step behind you anyway. What does that say?

VAN ANDA

People will believe anyone with a loud voice.

STEWART

People know the truth when they see it.

VAN ANDA

And lose it again the minute they make the storyteller the story.

STEWART

Then make us all the story.

(beat)

Tommy, Alex, Jack, Fred--they all hold you as something to strive for. And yes, that's hard. That's a lonely road to walk, but that's also not something you get to refuse.

(beat)

It's not your job to step down. It's your job to help the rest of us up. *

(beat)

You wanted to tell this story for what you thought it said about you. Tell it for what it says about all of us.

A long pause.

VAN ANDA

How is it one manages to accrue so much wisdom in so few years?

STEWART

One of the perks of watching from the stands.

Miller enters with ADOLPH OCHS, the owner and publisher of The New York Times.

OCHS

VA.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Ochs.

OCHS

Adolph, please. Let's not stand on ceremony, even under circumstances such as these.

MILLER

Shall we, gentlemen?

Miller leads Ochs and Van Anda into the Editor's Office and shuts the door.

Stewart watches them go. Once the newsroom is empty, he reaches across the chessboard and sets Van Anda's king upright once more.

Lights shift and rise on the Editor's Office. Miller sits behind Van Anda's desk and slides a piece of paper to him.

MILLER

This is what's on the typesetter. It's been proofed already. Just needs your signature before we go to print.

VAN ANDA

Adolph, I truly don't believe your signature is necessary. Let me bear the weight of this mistake.

OCHS

Noble of you, but this is my paper. What's printed beneath our masthead is my responsibility.

Ochs takes the paper from Miller and skims over it.

MILLER

Cut and dried.

OCHS

Hm? Oh, quite right. But before we sign, I'd like to hear VA's account of the day's events.

MILLER

You can't be serious.

OCHS

Mr. Miller has kept me abreast of the circumstances surrounding this mornings extra editions, but I'd like to hear them from you as well.

MILLER

He's put our entire business as risk and you're going to let him defend himself.

OCHS

Mr. Miller, if you're ordering the retraction of a headline, I'd like to know as much as possible.

(beat)

Go ahead, VA.

Lights shift back to the newsroom, where Stewart remains at the chessboard. Birchall enters, crosses to his desk for a notepad, then looks around.

BIRCHALL

Where's VA?

STEWART

In his office with Mr. Ochs and Mr. Miller.

BIRCHALL

Of course.

A telephone rings.

BIRCHALL

(into phone)

Birchall...Percy, it's over. They're pulling it now...Wait...what? No, no, no, I got it, just--Hold on...

(to Stewart)

Go get the staff.

STEWART

Where are they?

BIRCHALL

Tommy's in the morgue, Jack's convulsing in the stairwell, and Woollcott's upstairs, talking Fairbanks out of his last dollar.

STEWART

What about--?

BIRCHALL
For Christsake, kid, GO!

Stewart leaps to his feet, but
immediately falls flat on his face.

BIRCHALL
You alright?

STEWART
My legs are asleep.

BIRCHALL
Welcome to the Times, kid.

Stewart hoists himself back to his feet
and rushes out through the stairwell.

BIRCHALL

(into phone)
Alright, Percy, go...

Birchall snatches a pencil from his
desk and begins to scribble wildly. The
lights shift back to the Editor's
Office.

OCHS
That's quite a story.

VAN ANDA
It's been quite a day.

MILLER
I'll say.

OCHS
Tell me, do you believe we should retract?

MILLER
Retraction is our only chance to save this paper's
reputation.

OCHS
Charles, please--

MILLER

(standing)
We've put a man who thinks himself a prophet in charge of
crafting our headlines.

VAN ANDA

I never said I was a prophet.

MILLER

Please, your entire staff thinks you walk on water. The way they whisper about you--

OCHS

Charles--

MILLER

As though you're divinely inspired, as though you possess some omnipotence the rest of us lack.

OCHS

That's enough.

MILLER

I can see through you, Carr. I know what you are and it isn't a messiah.

OCHS

I said, that's *enough!*

(a long pause)

Mr. Miller, you've more than made your case. VA, do you think we should retract?

Van Anda is silent.

OCHS (CONT'D)

Carr, do you truly believe the Titanic sank?

Another pause. A smirk blossoms on Van Anda's face and he arrives at himself.

VAN ANDA

I do.

MILLER

Hold on--

OCHS

Do we retract?

VAN ANDA

No.

MILLER

What the hell do you think you're doing?

VAN ANDA

Playing the odds.

MILLER

You see? Delusional. No solid confirmation. He's citing his own hunch as unimpeachable fact.

VAN ANDA

You're right, of course, Charles.

MILLER

I'm sorry?

VAN ANDA

I said you're right.

MILLER

I don't--I'm sorry, what?

VAN ANDA

To cite my own instinct is absurd.

MILLER

Your instinct is the only reason with story exists.

VAN ANDA

That's not true. We have facts, sources.

MILLER

None of which are anywhere near the truth.

VAN ANDA

The facts are the dots on the page and the truth the lines between them.

(beat)

And people know the truth when they see it.

MILLER

Be that as it may, this story isn't going to hold up against the White Star Line or the International Mercantile Marine. With the bloodbath that is the Republican Primary right now, JP Morgan stands at worst a decent chance of skirting anti-trust legislation. Reporting the most noteworthy ship in his fleet, a ship that by all accounts is unsinkable--

VAN ANDA

Practically unsinkable.

MILLER

--sank in the North Atlantic is going to cut into his business a little. If you want to take on the IMM, be my guest. But I won't stand idly by as you defile this publication to do so.

VAN ANDA

The only defiling of this publication would be retracting this morning's headline.

MILLER

A headline which is quite possibly responsible for inducing panic and mass hysteria. You are aware that people have flooded the White Star Line to see if their loved ones are alive, yes?

VAN ANDA

Would you have preferred I not run the story?

MILLER

I take no issue reporting the distress call. Every other paper ran it.

VAN ANDA

If we truly want to stand out, we can't compare our reporting to that of every other paper.

MILLER

The fact remains you obscured the truth with these accounts of epic disaster for the sake of making yourself the story--

VAN ANDA

You're suggesting I'd do something so unthinkable?

MILLER

Unthinkable or practically unthinkable?

VAN ANDA

What's done is done.

MILLER

That may be so, but what was done is an embarrassment.

VAN ANDA

An embarrassment worse than retracting a breaking story that turns out to be true?

MILLER

The way I see it, you have two choices: one, sign the apology and you get to come to work tomorrow. Two, you're fired. Choose.

VAN ANDA

Mr. Miller, if I sign that paper, there's no reason to come to work tomorrow.

MILLER

You'll never work in the news again. No one will remember your name.

VAN ANDA

They don't need to remember my name.

OCHS

Charles, give us the room, would you?

MILLER

We're not finished.

OCHS

Just a moment, Charles.

MILLER

(beat)

I'm sorry it had to be this way.

VAN ANDA

I'm not.

Miller exits the Editor's Office and disappears into the dark of the newsroom.

OCHS

He's an asshole.

*

VAN ANDA

You just noticed?

OCHS

No, today is just one of those days where it's especially prevalent.

*

(beat)

How is it you screwed this up do bad?

VAN ANDA

Just lucky, I guess.

OCHS

Yeah, yeah, yeah, whimsy.

(beat)

We can't stand by the story, Carr.

*

*

VAN ANDA

What do you mean?

*

*

OCHS

Miller's right. Morgan will come down on us. Hard.

*

*

VAN ANDA

What if we're right?

*

*

OCHS *
Then we'll print the Titanic sank. *

VAN ANDA *
A retraction to a retraction? *

OCHS *
If that's what has to be done-- *

VAN ANDA *
"It will be my honest aim that The New York Times give the *
news, all the news, in concise and attractive form--" *

OCHS *
Don't quote me back to me. *

VAN ANDA *
"--give it as early, if not earlier, than it can be learned *
through any other reliable medium--" *

OCHS *
Alright, yes-- *

VAN ANDA *
"--to give the news impartially, without fear or fervor--" *

OCHS *
Good god, will you stop? *

VAN ANDA *
"--to make the columns of The New York Times a forum for the *
consideration of all questions of public importance." *

OCHS *
Alright, alright. What's your point? *

VAN ANDA *
When did we stop trying? When did we decide mediocrity was *
worth striving for? *

(beat) *
Are we doing this or not? Because this was the deal from the *
start. You don't do the news without stepping out on the *
ledge. You want to be the first through the wall, you're *
going to get bloody. *

(beat) *
You want to tell the truth, people are going to push back. *
And that's fine, let 'em. It's not our job to prove they're *
wrong and we're right. We're not out to convince anyone of *
anything. *

(beat) *

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

But we also can't roll over the minute we're met with the slightest resistance. As soon as someone points at a headline and says, "that's not how it is..." If we get it wrong, fine, we say so. But to back down just because someone else says so? That's not what we do.

(beat)

You want to retract, fine. You'll have to do it without me.

OCHS

You honestly think she sank.

VAN ANDA

I do.

OCHS

You're sure.

VAN ANDA

As sure as anything.

OCHS

And if you're wrong?

VAN ANDA

If I got it wrong, then I'm not perfect. But if I got it right, then none of us are perfect.

A knock at the office door. Paine enters.

PAINE

VA?

VAN ANDA

Not now, Mr. Paine.

PAINE

I have the proprietor of the Strand Hotel.

VAN ANDA

I'll take it here.

PAINE

Actually-- um--

VAN ANDA

What? What is it?

PAINE

He's calling for Mr. Ochs.

OCHS

Oh, this ought to be good.

Ochs picks up the receiver and shoos Paine out of the room. *

OCHS *

This is Adolph Ochs... Just fine, Mr. Morrison, and how about you?...Yes, that's correct, he did...Well, I appreciate the call, but it truly wasn't necessary...No, he knows what he's doing...Yes...Block the rooms...Yes, that's correct...Very good...I'll let him know. Thank you, sir. *

Ochs hangs up the phone and turns to Van Anda. *

OCHS *

Let's do the news, shall we? *

Ochs shakes Van Anda's hand. *

VAN ANDA *

Thank you. *

OCHS *

You know, on the rarest of occasions, you're even more a pain in the ass than Miller, you know that? *

VAN ANDA *

I'll take that as a compliment. *

OCHS *

Really, you shouldn't. *

A knock at the office door. Paine enters.

PAINE

Excuse me, VA? Mr. Ochs?

VAN ANDA

Yes, Mr. Paine?

PAINE

Percy Soule on the phone for you.

Van Anda looks at Ochs, who nods. Van Anda stands and crosses back into the newsroom, where lights rise to meet him. *

The staff have resumed their posts: Bracken and Birchall at their desks and Stewart at the chessboard. Miller paces upstage.

Van Anda crosses to Birchall, who hands him the telephone.

VAN ANDA

(into phone)

Hello? Mr. Soule?...Of Course. Is it--? Yes, alright. Right away.

Van Anda hands the phone back to Birchall and picks up another telephone.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Margaret, Mr. Franklin at the White Star Line, please.

(to Birchall)

Tell me when.

Birchall nods, then presses the receiver to his ear and listens.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Yes, hello Mr. Franklin. Carr Van Anda again...not yet, no. Quite the contrary actually. I'm calling because...

Birchall nods.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

...I have a man in the wireless station atop Wanamaker's. They've just received word from the Olympic...Yes...The Titanic is gone, Mr. Franklin...It seems her survivors are aboard the Carpathia, making full speed for New York...I'm calling for a comment...mmhmm...yes...

Van Anda takes a few notes with a pencil.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Yes, thank you, Mr. Franklin.

A long pause.

BIRCHALL

(with the phone to his ear)

Percy says they have names of survivors.

VAN ANDA

Let's get them down. Mr. Bracken, if you would--

Bracken takes the phone from Birchall, who scrambles to his typewriter. Paine sits beside Bracken and begins to take down names of survivors.

Van Anda hands Birchall his notes. Birchall begins to type.

BRACKEN

(with the phone to his ear)
Miss Sarah Compton...Dr. Henry William Fauthall...

VAN ANDA

Let's get as much as we can together and we'll run what we have when the evening deadline comes.

BRACKEN

Mrs. Madeleine Talmage Astor.

OCHS

I'd like word as soon as there's anything on Ismay.

BIRCHALL

He's the managing director of the line, wouldn't he have gone down with the ship?

OCHS

Have you met J. Bruce Ismay?

BRACKEN

J. Bruce Ismay.

PAINE

That's enough for a headline all on its own.

BIRCHALL

Maybe on a slow news day.

VAN ANDA

They all start as slow news days, don't they?

Woollcott rushes into the room, carrying a copy of The New York Sun.

WOOLLCOTT

They've done it again.

PAINE

What?

Woollcott holds up the paper to display the headline, which reads "ALL SAVED FROM TITANIC AFTER COLLISION."

BIRCHALL

Jesus.

PAINE

What does it say?

WOOLLCOTT

(reading)

"The White Star liner Titanic, having transferred her passengers to the Parisian and Carpathia, was at two o'clock this afternoon being towed to Halifax by the Virginian of the Allan Line."

PAINE

The Parisian and the Carpathia? What's their source?

BIRCHALL

They're probably saying the same thing about us.

WOOLLCOTT

It only gets worse. Listen.

(reading)

"The Virginian passed a line to the Titanic as soon as the passengers had been transferred, and the latest word received by wireless was that there was no doubt that the new White Star liner would reach port."

OCHS

(to Van Anda)

What did I tell you? Miles ahead.

Van Anda nods. Ochs and Van Anda begin to confer quietly.

PAINE

(to Woollcott)

I take cash or check.

WOOLLCOTT

What's that?

PAINE

Our bet.

WOOLLCOTT

If I remember, correctly, the terms of our agreement stipulate--

PAINE

Nope, you're not getting out of this that easy.

WOOLLCOTT

What do you say to double or nothing--

BIRCHALL

Alex, just pay him already.

Woollcott rolls his eyes and fishes his billfold from his pocket.

PAINE

I'm by no means the kind of guy to say I told you so, but this is certainly an occasion where'd it'd be appropriate.

WOOLLCOTT

You're a monster.

PAINE

I prefer the term "businessman."

WOOLLCOTT

I loathe you.

PAINE

You love me.

Woollcott hands Paine a wad of cash and they return to their work.

Birchall tears the paper from his typewriter and crosses to Van Anda.

BIRCHALL

I need a proof on the new lead.

Van Anda reads and marks the paper with a pencil.

BIRCHALL (CONT'D)

What?

VAN ANDA

Adjectives.

(beat)

We're putting together a satellite office near the docks. I'd like you to run it.

BIRCHALL

Me?

VAN ANDA

That's right.

BIRCHALL

You're sure.

VAN ANDA

Every man needs a conscience, Mr. Birchall.

(beat)

You were right, Fred.

(handing paper back)

Get this down to O'Neill.

BIRCHALL

Thank you, VA.

VAN ANDA

Thank you.

Birchall exits through the stairwell.
Van Anda turns and sees Miller, still
pacing upstage.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Mr. Miller, are you joining us?

Miller looks to Van Anda and hesitates
a moment, then gives a subtle nod. Van
Anda points to Bracken's desk. Miller
obliges, crossing to assist.

Van Anda crosses to Stewart, who is
asleep upright at the chessboard.

VAN ANDA (CONT'D)

Mr. Stewart.

STEWART

(startled awake)

Huh? Oh, right, yes--

VAN ANDA

You should go home, son.

STEWART

We haven't finished our game.

(beat)

It's your move, sir.

Van Anda reaches down and moves a
piece. Stewart responds, then Van Anda
again. They trade a few moves until--

Mate.

STEWART

Van Anda smiles and nods.

STEWART (CONT'D)

Again, VA?

VAN ANDA

Actually, I'm sure Mr. Paine could use a hand with the passenger list. *

STEWART

Yes, sir.

Stewart leaps to his feet, filled with a newfound energy, then stops a moment and turns back to Van Anda.

STEWART (CONT'D)

VA, sir?

VAN ANDA

Yes, Mr. Stewart?

STEWART

We were right.

VAN ANDA

Yes, Mr. Stewart. Yes, we were.

The newsroom has become a whirl of activity, the reporters typing, writing, and compiling notes. Birchall returns from the stairwell and rejoins the frenzy.

Van Anda crosses to Ochs, who places a hand on Van Anda's shoulder and nods.

The lights begin to face once more, a spot rises at center. Van Anda crosses and stands under the light.

VAN ANDA

"Tuesday, April 16th, 1912."

Van Anda remains center as other spotlights rise on the rest of the ensemble.

BIRCHALL

"Titanic sinks fours hours after hitting iceberg..."

BRACKEN

"...eight-hundred sixty rescued by Carpathia..."

PAINE

"...one-thousand two hundred fifty perish..."

WOOLLCOTT

"...noted names missing..."

The headlines begin to bleed together,
their delivery coming louder and
faster, until one spills into the next.

STEWART

"...biggest liner plunges to the bottom at 2:20 AM..."

OCHS

"...sunk by an iceberg and has gone down to the bottom of the
Atlantic..."

MILLER

"...the biggest steamship in the world..."

We hear music, an arrangement of
"Nearer My God To Thee." It plays
softly at first, but begins to swell.

PAINE

"...women and children first..."

BIRCHALL

"...carrying more than 1,400 of her passengers and crew with
her..."

WOOLLCOTT

"...rescuers there too late..."

MILLER

"...admission made by the White Star Line at 8:20 last
night..."

Van Anda looks around him and smiles.
He sees what's happening. The music
begins to overtake the voices.

BRACKEN

"...P.A.S. Franklin, Vice President and General Manager of
the International Mercantile Marine..."

BIRCHALL

"...manager of line insisted Titanic was unsinkable even
after she had gone down..."

WOOLLCOTT

"...sea search for others..."

PAINE

"...no rescues by Allan liners..."

STEWART

"...tireless search of the seas for further news..."

Van Anda steps out of the spotlight,
crosses upstage to his office. Before
the darkness takes the stage, he shuts
the door.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY