

Chapter 1: *Morro Castle* off the Coast of New Jersey, September 7, 1934

Wearing a stylish Canton crepe evening frock with velvet shoulder bows, Dora sat all alone. Sipping an after-dinner coffee on the upper level of the first-class lounge, she peered out a porthole. She wondered if the ship was going to sink.

At six in the evening it looked like night. Wind stirred the waves into gray, frothy peaks. Lightning streaked across the sky. Thunder shook the ship, making the coffee spill all over its saucer. Rain pelted down over the whitecaps. Big swells lifted the *Morro Castle* and put her down on the return trip from Havana to New York.

“Mrs. Byrne, I have an urgent message for you.” A Cuban waiter appeared at Dora’s table. A white envelope lay on top of his silver tray.

She handed the man a generous tip and opened the envelope. The handwriting on the enclosed note looked entirely unfamiliar. Bold characters leaped off the paper and smacked her in the face.

September 7, 1934

Dear Mrs. Michael Byrne:

Leave what my handlers and I must have on the table — the newest of those Lawrence maps! I will retrieve them before the waiter does. I’m nothing if not nimble and quick. To prove my point, glance to your right. I’m seated only three tables away.

Your Doom

She turned to the right. A very young man, twenty at most, dressed impeccably in black tie evening wear with a white carnation in his lapel, raised his hand and waved. He was about five foot six with midnight black hair that curled around his

milky white cheeks. His clear blue eyes stared back at her. He picked up his champagne glass, winked at her, and smiled.

Dora leaped from her seat. Her handbag slammed into her side as she dashed down the grand staircase to the main level. Despite the plush carpeting, she had to hold onto the railing as the ship pitched and rolled. She nearly ran headlong into a waiter carrying a silver tray with crystal glasses. Gin sloshed over the white linen tray mat.

She wasn't involved in hiding those Lawrence maps, at least not for many years, not since 1921 to be exact. Why this stranger was coming after her about them, she couldn't imagine. But that spelled danger. She would have to tell Edward all about it.

When she reached the dance floor, the room was thick with passengers and musicians. Dora could not see the exit. Everyone around her was doing the jitterbug, though they were being thrown against each other by the rough seas. Being married to Michael — the dour, serious, and overworked Vice President of her father's company, Benley Tire and Rubber, who came on this cruise to sell tires in Havana — did not exactly provide her an opportunity to try it. Methodists — and Michael was always a very devout one — did not approve of dancing.

Someone grabbed her around the waist. She found herself gazing into the startlingly blue eyes of the mysterious stranger from the balcony section of the first class lounge.

"I wondered when we would meet, Mrs. Byrne," he spoke with a high-toned British accent even though he didn't quite look British. That intense black hair made him seem foreign, even exotic.

They could not stand still in the midst of the surging dance crowd. They were forced to do the jitterbug.

"So you are Edward Ware's *sweetheart!*" the young man said with emphasis.

She hoped this young man did not notice her blush under the glaring yellow, overhead lights. She never discussed Edward with strangers. It wasn't safe with her husband on the same ship.