

DEPTH OF DECEPTION

A Play in One Act

By

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Adapted from the 2012 Novel

DEPTH OF DECEPTION (A TITANIC MURDER MYSTERY)

Also by Alexander Galant

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Cast of Characters

<u>Natalie Lindsay:</u>	A woman in her 30s; (any nationality) a psychiatrist in Manhattan. She is very smart and will try anything to help her patients.
<u>Myra:</u>	Young woman in her early 20s; was found wearing an Edwardian dress in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. She has no memory of who she is. She has a hint of a British accent.
<u>Edward Hoffman:</u>	A gentleman who is 72; a retired psychiatrist and Titanic expert. He survived the sinking of the famous ship.

Setting

A private psychiatric clinic in Manhattan.

Time

The first week of April 1982.

Scenes

Scene 1	Myra's room	Morning
Scene 2	Natalie's Office	An hour later
Scene 3	Natalie's Office	Late afternoon
Scene 4	Myra's room	That evening
Scene 5	Clinic's Lounge	Next evening

Scene 1

SETTING: April 1982. We are in the patient's room. There is a small table with two chairs. On the table is an 80's tape recorder and a spiral note-pad with a pen.

AT RISE: The curtain comes up to a dimly lit stage. MYRA (in an elegant Edwardian dress) is seated in one chair, shivering. DR. NATALIE LINDSAY begins the process of hypnosis, asking MYRA to close her eyes and raise and drop her right arm, which she does effortlessly. NATALIE continues to whisper to her while hear the voice of a REPORTER, off stage.

REPORTER (*off stage*)

Could this be a case of an April Fool's prank gone horribly wrong? The HMS McKinnley received a distress call just after midnight today, and found a young woman floating alone in the Atlantic. She was recovered from the ocean and is suffering from hypothermia and apparent amnesia. The woman has no identification and has been taken in for medical treatment. Anyone with any information, please contact authorities....

(Lights come up full)

NATALIE

(softly)

Now, raise your right arm.

(MYRA tries but her arm won't cooperate.)

MYRA
(dreamily)

I can't!

(NATALIE presses 'record' on the
tape recorder.)

NATALIE
April 2, 1982. Dr. Natalie Lindsay hypnosis session with
Jane Doe, found in the North Atlantic Ocean.

(NATALIE Grabs the pad and pen.)
We'll start with some simple questions to start. What
colour are your eyes?

MYRA
(in a trance)

Blue.

NATALIE
Are you warm or cold?

MYRA
Cold! Very cold.

NATALIE
What is your name?

MYRA
Myra.

NATALIE
Thank you, Myra. What is your last name?
(MYRA struggles. Shows signs of
agitation.)

Relax, Myra. That's not important now. Imagine you're on a
clear blue lake... no... no... Imagine sitting in front of
a warm fire place. Feel the warmth embracing you, taking
the cold and fear away from you. Let the crackling flames
illuminate the darkness in your mind.

(MYRA stops shivering.)

NATALIE (Cont.)

Let's go back. Before you were found in the water, how did you get to the middle of the Atlantic?

MYRA

I was on a boat...

NATALIE

Can you describe it?

MYRA

It's big.

NATALIE

Is it a yacht?

MYRA

Bigger than a yacht... it's a passenger ship...

NATALIE

Are you traveling alone?

MYRA

No.

NATALIE

Who else is traveling with you?

MYRA

My husband... my son. And... and someone else...

NATALIE

Can you see this other person's face?

MYRA

Yes. It's a woman...

(MYRA starts having trouble breathing.)

NATALIE

What's wrong, Myra?

MYRA

I'm not feeling well. I haven't felt well for most of the trip. It's odd.

NATALIE

Why is it odd?

MYRA

I have traveled all my life and I have never experienced seasickness. Now I have a weak constitution. I am not capable of keeping any food down, and I've been burning up. I feel so dizzy.

NATALIE

Did you fall overboard?

MYRA

No. Something's wrong! The ship's engines have stopped. I've been asleep, where is my husband? Where is my son? I can't find them!

NATALIE

(soothing)

Myra, think of the fireplace. Feel the warmth...

MYRA

The fireplace! Oh, I knocked the tea cart toward the fireplace.

NATALIE

Tea cart?

MYRA

My tea. I'm supposed to drink my tea to calm my nerves. What is my son's teddy bear doing under the tea cart? Where's my son? The stateroom... it's on an odd angle. The tea cart is rolling past me... things are falling...

(MYRA becomes more frantic. NATALIE

reaches out to wake her)

Is anyone in the adjoining cabin? No? The teddy bear is

MYRA (Cont.)

floating by... Mr. Fluffy! My son wouldn't leave without Mr. Fluffy. Where's my son? I can't find my son!

NATALIE

Use your other senses. Can you hear anyone?

MYRA

I can hear people screaming... the ship is sinking?! It's not possible...!

NATALIE

Not possible?

MYRA

The ship is unsinkable. We're on the Titanic!

(LIGHTS FADE)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 2

SETTING: Natalie's office, an hour later. The small table is converted to a desk upon which we find an electric typewriter, a phone, a folded newspaper and a psychology text book.

AT RISE: NATALIE typing at her desk.

NATALIE

The patient's subconscious mind has set up obstacles and created this Titanic delusion in order to suppress some sort of traumatic experience. Likely something to do with a child.

(NATALIE notices the newspaper sitting in her wooden inbox tray on her desk. She grabs it and opens it. The headline reads: **Titanic 2 - This time it is Unsinkable!**)

NATALIE

Titanic two? Wonder if she saw this story somehow and it helped manifest...

(Something catches NATALIE'S eye. She picks it up and starts to read)

Dr. Edward Hoffman, Titanic survivor, author and expert on the original ship will be on the maiden voyage...

(NATALIE opens the text book on her desk. Reads a chapter heading.)

Unlocking Traumatic Events Trapped in the Subconscious Mind by Dr. Edward Hoffman.

(NATALIE picks up the phone and dials for reception.)

Hi, Susan, last year, Edward Hoffman made a huge donation at our fund-raiser. Do we have his number on file?

(LIGHTS FADE)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 3

SETTING: Natalie's office. Later the same afternoon.

AT RISE: EDWARD HOFFMAN, a distinguished elderly gentleman, sits in front of Dr. Natalie's desk. He puts a briefcase at his feet.

NATALIE

Thank you for coming in at this hour, Dr. Hoffman.

EDWARD

Please, call me Edward. I happened to be in the city today, and I had seen your patient in the news so my curiosity was already piqued.

NATALIE

Very well... Edward. You can call me Natalie. I'm guessing you've come across... 'situations' like this before.

EDWARD

Well it is safe to say that I've met my fair share of Titanic-nuts... I'm sorry, I shouldn't use phrases like that in here.

NATALIE

Some of the staff use it... Just don't do it in front of the patients.

EDWARD

Of course. As I was saying, I have met a great many Titanic-fanatics and most are quite harmless. Does your patient truly believe she was... aboard the Titanic?

NATALIE

I want to clarify that I'm reaching out to you not only as a Titanic survivor but also as a psychiatrist.

EDWARD

Ah, yes, So you know that I received my PhD after the Second World War?

NATALIE

May I consult with you regarding my patient...?

EDWARD

Indeed. In respect to patient-doctor confidentiality, the press shall not glean anything from me.

NATALIE

Thank you, Edward. I read in your bio that you were two years old when the Titanic sank.

EDWARD

There are some moments that are very clear from that night, but in all honesty, I've spoken to so many survivors over the years that there are times I'm not certain which were my memories, and which were theirs.

NATALIE

I appreciate your honesty.

EDWARD

Those of us who survived the sinking of Titanic... never really escaped from it.

(beat)

The news said there was a boarding pass found with her.

(NATALIE retrieves a piece of paper as EDWARD reaches into his briefcase and pulls out a Titanic book.)

NATALIE

This is a photocopy, the original one is still being authenticated.

(EDWARD examines it carefully.)

EDWARD

It looks authentic.

(EDWARD compares it to a photo in
his book.)

NATALIE

There lies the dilemma of this case. Does she truly believe
that she was on the Titanic?

EDWARD

If so, would she go to the trouble of forging a fake
Titanic boarding pass?

(EDWARD hands the copy of the ticket back).

NATALIE

Exactly! At what point does awareness of her own actions
end? She's either fully immersed in this fantasy and
perhaps has a sympathetic accomplice, or she's a very good
actress.

EDWARD

I've dealt with good actresses before. I once had dealings
with a woman who claimed to be the only child that perished
from First Class... and heir to a fortune, I might add.

NATALIE

I'm guessing she was a fraud?

EDWARD

Completely. It was a terrible ordeal for the family as well
to open up old wounds, but I was able to find the flaws in
her 'story'. I expect to do the same with your patient.

NATALIE

Once we prove she was not on the Titanic, I can proceed
with her treatment.

EDWARD

Can you answer me one question? What class did she say she was in?

NATALIE

Class?

EDWARD

First, second or third class passenger?

NATALIE

She didn't say... wait...

(NATALIE flips through her note pad.)

Here it is... she mentioned a stateroom, a fireplace, an adjoining cabin and a tea cart.

EDWARD

Ah! First Class. I know how to proceed.

NATALIE

What do you suggest?

EDWARD

Dinner.

(EDWARD flips through the Titanic book to a pre-marked page and hands it to NATALIE.)

NATALIE

(reading)

Poached Salmon with Mousseline Sauce, Filet Mignon Lili, Pâté d'foie grass...?

EDWARD

(correcting)

Pâté de Foie Gras.

NATALIE

I don't think I can afford reading this menu let alone eating from it. It's an eleven course meal.

EDWARD

Cost is not a factor. I will cover the expense. I know of a wonderful chef here in Manhattan who can cater the whole meal perfectly.

(NATALIE looks down at the photo in the book.)

NATALIE

But don't you think our patient might have also read this book?

EDWARD

That my dear Doctor, is what I'm counting on.

(LIGHTS FADE)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 4

SETTING: Myra's room. That night.
Same table and two chairs.

AT RISE: MYRA is rises from the chair
and knocks on the "door".

MYRA

Let me out of here! I need to find my husband and son.
Where's that woman doctor!

(Frustrated)

Balderdash! Who ever heard of a woman being allowed to
study psychology... and with the impropriety to display her
knees...

(MYRA knocks again, and collapses
against the wall.)

Let me out of here! I need to find my son... my son... Why
can't I remember his name? What kind of mother am I?

(MYRA sits in the chair and closes
her eyes trying to relax as before.)

Warm fireplace. Think of a warm fireplace... that
fireplace doesn't work... it's faux... there was a clock on
the fireplace mantle... the room smells like fresh roses...
and lemon oil polish... Why am I cursed with those details
yet I can't remember my son's name...

(She reacts)

His voice... I can hear him calling, "Mummy"!

(MYRA goes again to pound on the door)

I have to find the Titanic. It must be in port.

(screams)

Does anyone know where the Titanic is?

(LIGHTS FADE)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 5

SETTING: Clinic lounge, the next evening. A round table is formally set, in the correct European fashion, for three people (3 forks to the left of each plate, 2 knives and a spoon to the right, bread plate over the forks, 3 glassware over the knives and a cloth napkin like a cone in the center of each plate.) A cart/sideboard with covered plates and wine bottles sits nearby.

AT RISE: Ragtime music plays.
EDWARD double checks that the cutlery is in place as
NATALIE and MYRA enter.

MYRA

Ragtime. How lovely.

EDWARD

Hello I'm...

(EDWARD is taken aback when seeing
MYRA for first time)

Have we met before?

MYRA

I don't believe so. Although, there is something in your eyes that seems... familiar. I was hoping you might be able to help.

EDWARD

Forgive me for staring. If I may be so bold, you have the most remarkable eyes I have ever seen.

MYRA

Thank you, Doctor... er...

EDWARD

Please no titles here, please call me Edward.

MYRA

Very well... Edward.

(beat)

A fine name.

(EDWARDS looks to NATALIE for her cue)

NATALIE

Right... I do the intro. Edward, may I introduce... Myra.

(As Edward takes her hand and kisses the back of it.)

EDWARD

What a coincidence. That's my mother's name.

MYRA

A noble woman, I hope.

(EDWARDS answers only with a smile as he pulls the chairs out for both ladies.)

EDWARD

We'll be starting with Oysters à la Russe.

(to MYRA)

Would you like White Bordeaux, White Burgundy or Chablis?

MYRA

You're asking me?

NATALIE

Something wrong with that?

MYRA

It is not customary that a man would ask a woman to order.

EDWARD

Ah, but you are the guest.

MYRA

Very well then. Chablis would be the best choice with oysters.

(EDWARD samples a taste before the others are poured. MYRA spreads the cloth napkin across her lap. NATALIE clumsily copies her.)

EDWARD

(as he pours)

There you go.

MYRA

This was served the other night.

NATALIE

The other night?

MYRA

On board the Titanic. I remember that!

EDWARD

Excellent! I wanted you to feel comfortable. So I spared no expense in recreating the meal exactly as it was on board the... Titanic.

(EDWARD then picks up his glass and holds it to toast.)

To recovering your memory.

NATALIE

I'll drink to that.

(ALL take a sip)

EDWARD

(to MYRA)

What else do you remember about Titanic?

MYRA

I recall images mostly. Very much like paintings. The smell of the food and the music seems to help. I can recall the Dining Lounge where this meal was served.

EDWARD

Can you describe it?

MYRA

(MYRA closes her eyes.)

It was mostly white, which made the style Jacobean. I believe the furniture was oak, which matched the walls, and upholstered with...Green velvet. The dining room itself was very large, and the floors were tiled... ..not marble, but rather hundreds of soft tiles patterned to resemble a Persian carpet.

(EDWARD looks suitably impressed)

On the high ceiling I recall a glass dome. Some lovely leaded windows and quaint alcoves. There were also recessed dining bays where families and other parties could dine with some privacy. I was in one of those bays.

EDWARD

Really? Do you recall which one?

MYRA

I'm sorry. I cannot. It was a very large room.

(Music plays and they 'enjoy' the first course. EDWARD studies how MYRA expertly uses her cutlery. NATALIE is not as smooth as she almost comically figures out which one to use, by gesturing quietly to EDWARD, who either shakes his head or nods.)

(MYRA suddenly rises from her chair, and EDWARD does the same in proper etiquette.)

MYRA

Excuse me.

NATALIE

What is it?

MYRA

I need to visit the powder room.

NATALIE

Of course. The orderly outside the door will escort you.

(MYRA exits)

NATALIE

This is all very nice. But have we learned anything?

EDWARD

Oh, yes. This woman is well bred. She has done more than memorize the menu from a book. She has been educated in fine dining etiquette. And European etiquette to be exact.

NATALIE

How can you tell?

(EDWARD switches the setting for the second course as—)

EDWARD

From how she uses and places the cutlery.

NATALIE

So maybe she was schooled in Europe. That might also explain the slight accent - some kind of boarding school perhaps?

EDWARD

My thoughts exactly.

NATALIE

So? How do we prove to her that she wasn't on Titanic?

EDWARD

She is about to fail the test. Watch.

(MYRA re-enters and glides back to her seat, EDWARD once again stands up just

before she's about to sit, and holds the chair for her. As MYRA sits she glances down at her plate and starts to laugh.)

EDWARD

What's so funny?

MYRA

Forgive me, Edward. You have done a splendid recreation of the dinner from the Titanic. However, you have made a small error.

EDWARD

Error?

MYRA

Oh it's an honest mistake I'm sure. The dinner menu did state 'Poached Salmon with Mousseline Sauce'. We were, however, served 'Salmon Mayonnaise Potted Shrimps' instead.

EDWARD

How?... How did you know?

MYRA

I was there. I love poached salmon with Mousseline Sauce and was dreadfully disappointed when they didn't serve it.

(MYRA points off stage to indicate the musicians)

In addition, the music isn't quite right. Mr. Hartley's orchestra only played Ragtime during luncheons. In the evening he played more soothing pieces like the Merry Widow Waltz or the Blue Danube.

(The "band" stops. MYRA starts to hum the Blue Danube and closes here eyes.)

(Myra frowns)

My son didn't like the potted shrimp. He dropped them on the floor and kicked them out of sight under the table. His father caught him in the act. Without any warning he struck...

EDWARD

Stop!

(MYRA opens her eyes in shock. EDWARD stands.
Then to NATALIE)

I've had enough of this charade. Please excuse me.

(EDWARD exits. MYRA looks to NATALIE
for answers.)

(LIGHTS RISE on other side of stage while
MYRA and NATALIE are still visible.)

EDWARD

Can't be... She must have been coached... by who?

(Myra looks down at her food, unable to
eat. EDWARD stumbles, MYRA is immediately
up. As EDWARD collapses, MYRA rushes to
EDWARD, followed by NATALIE.)

NATALIE

(calling off-stage)

Ralph! Call 9-1-1!

(to MYRA)

Don't move him!

(MYRA reaches EDWARD and turns him over,
cradling his head on her lap. EDWARD's
eyes fly open. He looks up at MYRA.-)

MYRA

(realization)

Eddie?!

EDWARD

Mummy?

(BLACKOUT.)

(CURTAIN)