

JENNIFER A. NIELSEN

ICEBERG



SCHOLASTIC PRESS • NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-1-338-79502-8

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 23 24 25 26 27

Printed in the U.S.A. 37

First edition, March 2023

Book design by Christopher Stengel

CHAPTER ONE

Before the End Came

In the end, in those final minutes before the *Titanic* sank into its grave, some people would jump overboard, taking their chances in the icy water. They had little hope of surviving, but if they continued clinging to the rails, they'd have no chance at all.

Others, resigned to their fate, stepped back and listened to the small group of musicians, playing on even as the water crept higher onto the deck. Maybe that was better, to seek peace in the inevitable.

Others still made themselves heroes in the end, working until their last breath was swallowed up in an ocean of water, hoping to give those on deck another minute of life. They might have proven themselves to be the finest among us.

Yet the stories will be told of those who had no choice.

Stories of those who ran for the nearest stairwells, hoping to reach a higher deck, or praying for the chance to reach a lifeboat, but found themselves trapped behind watertight doors, without a chance to survive.

I know these stories are true. Because I was one of them.

CHAPTER TWO

Everything Seemed Perfect

Wednesday, April 10, 1912

A British legend from nine hundred years ago describes the Viking king Canute, who had his throne carried to the shores of Southampton. There on the beach, he stood before the mighty ocean and commanded the incoming tide to stop so as not to wet his royal robes.

But the water was indifferent to the command and flowed onto the shores, soaking the great king's robes. Dripping with ocean water, the king turned to his followers to say, "Even with all my power, I am nothing compared to the heavens and earth. I worship the heavens, and I respect the might of this world."

My father used to tell me that story every time he returned from his fishing trips. But that was years ago. I was twelve years old now, and far older in my mind, as I'd never cared much for childish things. Except for Papa's story. I did used to

love that, and every word came rushing back to me on the day I first saw the *Titanic*.

Because here I was now, on the very same shores of Southampton, England. Although I wasn't down on the beach, but on the port above it, staring up at a ship that aimed to defy King Canute's words.

The *Titanic* was everything the papers had described: as powerful as the Titans of mythology, and as elegant as if it were a floating castle. It did not respect the might of this world because it *was* the might of this world.

The *Titanic* was also the largest man-made moving object in the world. Taller than the great pyramids of Egypt, or any cathedral of Europe; as long as four city blocks. Each of its four smokestacks was wide enough that a locomotive could drive through it, and its anchors were said to weigh fifteen tons each. Indeed, the *Titanic* was so bold in appearance that the newspapers called it the world's first unsinkable ship.

The ship that claimed it would command the very tides of the ocean.

I'd done my research. On a four-day walk from my home in the southern tip of England to the ports of Southampton, I'd pulled newspapers from every rubbish bin I could find, scouring the pages for any information on the White Star Line's newest and grandest ship.

But reading about it did little to prepare me for the wonder of actually seeing it.

I wasn't the only one standing in awe. A vast crowd had gathered to watch the *Titanic* depart on its maiden voyage.

I couldn't begin to guess at how many people had come, but surely it was in the tens of thousands. Men lifted children to their shoulders, and women stood on their toes for a better look at the ship, or to crane their necks in hopes of seeing any of the wealthy and famous passengers.

Those passengers weren't boarding here at the dock level, naturally. If life had elevated them above us common folk, then the gangplank itself also had to be elevated. The wealthiest passengers had a separate entrance, bringing them directly into the upper decks of the ship.

Meanwhile, those of us in the poorer class moved among the cargo, waiting in endless lines for what appeared to be a doctor's inspection before we'd be allowed on board.

The variety of people in line amazed me. I'd never seen so many people who must have come from all parts of the world. Some traveled alone, and others with entire families.

I understood the gleam in their eyes, the excitement of being part of this adventure of traveling to a new country. America was supposed to be a land where even the poorest person had a chance to build a life for themselves, sometimes even to find wealth.

That wouldn't be my future. Papa had died two years ago during a storm at sea. Mum had done her best to support us, but each month we had fallen further behind. Then two weeks ago, we had received a letter from my mum's sister in America. She had heard of our difficulties and was inviting me to come to America and work alongside her in a garment factory. The work would be difficult and sometimes dangerous, she'd said,

but I could board with her free of charge, then send nearly everything I earned home to my family.

While Mum had read me the letter, her forehead had lined with wrinkles, each line deeper than the one above it. And when she finished, she set it down, saying, "I'm so very sorry, Hazel. What do you think?"

I'd thought it sounded horrible. Until that letter came, I'd had big dreams for my life, plans and possibilities that filled my imagination. I was going to make something of my life.

The letter from my aunt ended those dreams. I wanted to tell my mum no, even to beg her to let me stay in England. But I couldn't do it, not when every rainstorm brought dripping water through our roof. Not when all of my four younger brothers needed new shoes and went barefoot most of the time. Mum had recently sold her wedding ring to pay a debt that was overdue. The truth was that there were no dreams to be had here at home.

So I'd made myself smile back at Mum and said, "I'll go."

She had wrapped me in her arms. "You are a better daughter than I deserve. The amount you earn may save our family, and perhaps in time, it will prove to be a good thing for you too."

Perhaps. But I rather doubted it.

That was how I ended up here, at the Southampton port, staring up at the ship destined to carry me to America, with every last farthing Mum could scrape together to pay for my passage.