

CHAPTER ONE



RMS *TITANIC* —
MONDAY, APRIL 15, 1912, 12:15 A.M.

Captain E. J. Smith noticed it the instant he stepped onto the boat deck. The bow was down. It would be imperceptible to all but the most experienced seaman. Yet to the commodore of the White Star Line, it was all too glaring and all too real. Also real was the tilt in the deck. Smith's sea legs had never failed him before — just as he'd never before sent a distress call . . . until tonight.

He took only a few seconds to appreciate once more the most magnificent ship that had ever sailed the seas. The largest, the most technologically advanced, the most luxurious, and — his lip quivered ever so slightly — the safest.

This was to have been his final voyage. Now he was certain of that fact.

But he had no time for reflection. There were

decisions to be made. It was the captain's job to make them.

He walked back to the bridge and faced Thomas Andrews, the *Titanic's* designer.

"Mr. Andrews, how many lifeboats do we have?" he asked.

The shipbuilder's expression was impassive. "Twenty, sir, including four Engelhardt collapsibles. Capacity one thousand one hundred and seventy-eight."

The captain nodded grimly. The passengers and crew numbered 2,223.



Junior Steward Alfie Huggins was soaked to the skin with icy seawater, but sweat poured from him as never before. With passengers Sophie Bronson and Juliana Glamm in tow, he raced aft in an attempt to escape the sinking bow of the mighty liner. They pounded along D Deck until a solid bulkhead barred their progress. A companion stair led them up to C, and they sprinted across the open well deck, dodging scattered ice fragments, some as large as steamer trunks.

Sophie's slipped foot came down on a chunk, and she nearly took a spill. Alfie hauled her upright without losing a step. The shard skittered away, colliding with many others.

“It’s hard to believe *this* is what damaged a ship this size!” Sophie gasped.

The ice had broken off a huge berg — now behind them — that had torn a three-hundred-foot gash in the *Titanic*’s belly.

“Damaged, yes, but the ship is unsinkable,” Juliana panted. “Isn’t it?”

The image that appeared in Alfie’s mind was his father in Number 5 Boiler Room, waist-deep in water. His exact words: *We’re going to find out.*

They entered the ship’s towering superstructure, dashing down a first-class companionway. Stewards filled the corridor, knocking on doors, helping bewildered passengers into bulky life belts. The general air was complaint and irritation.

“I say, it’s the middle of the night!”

“What is the purpose of this disturbance?”

“Why should we don life belts? God himself could not sink this ship!”

“It’s just a precaution,” Alfie heard a fellow steward soothe. “The captain has ordered everyone up on the boat deck. And dress warmly, please. The night is very cold.”

“All the more reason to remain in my cabin,” declared an elderly lady.

The *Titanic*’s first class was filled with the rich and

pampered of the world. They were not accustomed to being discommoded and marched about by mere servants.

The stewards were patient and unfailingly polite. But they did not take no for an answer.

Alfie and the girls dashed out of the companion-way and wheeled around to ascend the majestic grand staircase. There they found Second Officer Charles Herbert Lightoller heading briskly down the richly carpeted steps.

“Huggins,” Lightoller said, “why are you not attending to your passengers?”

“Miss Sophie and Miss Juliana *are* my passengers,” Alfie tried to explain.

But by this time, Lightoller had gotten a good look at the three of them. “Why are you all wet?”

“The bow is making water, sir!” Alfie explained breathlessly. “They’re on the pumps in Number 5 Boiler Room, but Number 6 is completely swamped!”

“And you took these young ladies with you,” Lightoller commented wryly. “How gallant. Get them to the boat deck — with life belts, if you please. Then see to the rest of your passengers.”

“Mr. Lightoller — is it really so serious?” Juliana asked timidly.

The officer’s expression was grave. “Take a look at

the state of your pretty gown, and you'll have your answer. Now move along."

Alfie started up the stairs. "Follow me!"

"I'm not going to the boat deck," Sophie told him. "At least, not yet. I have to find Mother."

"And I my father," Juliana agreed. Her eyes narrowed. "And I have a pretty good idea where he might be."



In the first-class lounge, there was no mention of icebergs or life belts — in fact, no sense of urgency at all. Men talked and played cards. Waiters served drinks. A cloud of cigar and pipe smoke hung in the air of the mahogany-paneled room. If the occupants had any idea of the commotion that roiled the other parts of the ship, they gave no indication.

Juliana found her father in the exact spot where he'd spent nine-tenths of the voyage thus far: at the large table in the center of the lounge, deeply embroiled in a high-stakes poker game.

She addressed him quietly. "Papa, we must go to the boat deck at once."

Rodney, Earl of Glamford, did not even look up at her as he examined his cards. "Why ever should I want to do that?" he murmured, lost in concentration.

“The captain has ordered it,” Juliana persisted. “All passengers are to don life belts —”

“Life belts?” She had her father’s attention now. He stared at her a moment and then chuckled. “My dear Julie, someone is having you on. What earthly purpose could life belts serve aboard the *Titanic*?”

“We’ve struck an iceberg —”

“Everyone knows that. We felt the jar. Simsbury spilled his drink on the table and we had to send for a new deck of cards.”

“Papa, the ship is filling up with water!”

“Nonsense. The *Titanic* is unsinkable. Besides” — he dropped his voice to a whisper — “I’m *winning*. I believe my luck is finally beginning to change.”