

CQD CQD SOS TITANIC TO ALL SHIPS. POSITION 41.44 N 50.24 W. WE HAVE COLLISION WITH ICEBERG. SINKING. COME AT ONCE. WE STRUCK AN ICEBERG. SINKING.

CARPATHIA TO TITANIC. PUTTING ABOUT AND HEADING FOR YOU.  
OLYMPIC TO TITANIC. CAPTAIN SAYS GET YOUR BOATS READY. WHAT IS YOUR POSITION?

TITANIC TO ALL SHIPS. SINKING HEAD DOWN 41.46 N 50.14 W. COME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

BALTIC TO CARONIA. PLEASE TELL TITANIC WE ARE MAKING TOWARDS HER.

TITANIC TO ALL SHIPS. WE ARE PUTTING PASSENGERS OFF IN SMALL BOATS.

OLYMPIC TO TITANIC. AM LIGHTING UP ALL POSSIBLE BOILERS AS FAST AS CAN.

TITANIC TO ALL SHIPS. ENGINE ROOM GETTING FLOODED.

VIRGINIAN TO CAPE RACE. PLEASE INFORM TITANIC THAT WE ARE GOING TO HIS ASSISTANCE. OUR POSITION IS 170 MILES NORTH.

TITANIC TO ALL SHIPS. SOS TITANIC SINKING BY THE HEAD. WE ARE ABOUT ALL DOWN. SINKING.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **April 15, 1912** **Cunard Liner RMS *Carpathia*** **North Atlantic**

Kate Royston stood by the rail and felt the wind tugging her hair free of its heavy dark braids. The night was calm, but the *Carpathia's* steady eastward progress created its own breeze. Behind her she could see smoke from the *Carpathia's* funnel creating a gray smudge across the starry night sky. Light from the stars glimmered on the ice surrounding the ship, and dark water marked the ship's careful progress through the scattered drifting floes.

Kate looked at her watch. The hands had inched past midnight, bringing her into April 15, 1912, her twenty-first birthday, but instead of dancing at her birthday ball, she was fleeing across the cold, dark ocean without a penny to her name.

As she stepped away from the rail, she narrowly avoided colliding with a man who slithered heedlessly down the ladder from the bridge deck. The light spilling from above showed that he was wearing an officer's uniform. She took another step away from the rail, hoping that her presence would not bring a reprimand. She shouldn't be here on the first-class promenade deck. She should be in the stuffy, overheated cabin that she shared with the two children of Daan and Magda van Buren, where she was an employee and, therefore, not a first-class passenger.

The man acknowledged her with a slight nod of his head as he fumbled in his pocket and produced a crumpled cigarette packet. She watched a brief blossoming of light as a match flared in his cupped hands.

"All those people," he said as he dragged on the cigarette and the tip glowed red.

"What people?" Kate asked.

The officer turned to face her. The light from the bridge deck showed her his young, agitated face. She had a moment of self-consciousness, knowing that her hair was unbraided and that, beneath her heavy coat, she wore only her nightdress.

"They're sinking, but he won't believe me."

"Sinking?" Kate asked in a small voice. "Are we sinking?"

"No, not us. The *Titanic*."

"*Titanic!*" she repeated. "Are you saying that the *Titanic* is sinking?"

"Yes."

"But I read the posters. She's unsinkable." She patted his arm consolingly. "I think you're having a bad dream."

The officer dragged on his cigarette again and gestured with the glowing tip. "Over there, about fifty miles away, the *Titanic* is going down."

"You can't know that."

"Yes, I can. I'm Harold Cottam. I'm the radio officer, and I took the Marconi message."

Cottam suddenly tossed his cigarette into the water and began to pace an agitated path along the rail, speaking frantically, as if he had a need to convince Kate that what he was saying was true.

"I should have been in bed, but I'd taken Marconi messages to forward to the *Titanic*. She had so much traffic through her radio, she couldn't take them all, so I was working a relay. I tried earlier in the evening, but their operator said for me to shut up because he was working Cape Race. He'd just come in reach of the relay station, so he was sending outgoing messages for the passengers. I decided to let it go for a while and try again later, when things had quieted down, and so that's what I did."

Cottam stopped pacing and snatched off his cap. "I shouldn't even have been on duty. I was going to send the messages on and then sign off for the night." He ran an agitated hand through his hair. "I should already have been off duty, but I wasn't. That means something, doesn't it? It's not a coincidence. God wanted me to hear them, didn't he?"

"I don't know," Kate said helplessly.

"You don't believe me," Cottam declared.

"No," Kate snapped. "I don't understand you." She spoke in the same tone she had used on her father on the night his drunkenness had given way to babbling self-pity. "Pull yourself together, Mr. Cottam, and tell me what has happened. I don't understand all this talk about Marconi and Cape Race, but I think I understand that you passed some messages to the *Titanic*."

Cottam shook his head vigorously. "No, I didn't have a chance. I had them lined up, ready to transmit, but as soon as I turned on the Marconi and tried to transmit, *Titanic's* operator flashed in. 'CQD. CQD.'"

"CQD? What does that mean?"

"It's a distress signal. It means for me to stop transmitting and listen. I asked if it was serious. I thought maybe their operator was just joking with me or wanted me to stop because he was so busy, so I flashed back and asked if it was serious. He said yes. 'Come at once. We've struck a berg.'"

Kate stared around at the vast, dark ocean and up at the trail of smoke from the funnel. The *Carpathia* showed no signs of slowing down or turning. If the officer's story was true, and the *Titanic* was in trouble, surely the *Carpathia* would go to her aid, and yet nothing was happening.

"Where is the *Titanic*?" she asked. "In what direction?"

Cottam gestured with his thumb. "Back that way."

"Why haven't we stopped?"

"Because the officers on the bridge don't believe me. I told the officer of the watch. I told the whole bridge crew, and none of them will believe me."

"Did you tell the captain?"

"He's asleep."

Kate felt the flaring of temper that had so often been her downfall, and possibly accounted for the fact that she was now very far from home.

"So what are you going to do? Are you just going to stand there smoking and allow the *Titanic* to sink because you're too frightened to tell the captain?"

Cottam straightened his shoulders. "No, of course not. I'm going to wake him. I just needed a moment alone to convince myself."

"Of what?"

"Our Marconi messages don't come in words. They come in Morse code, just little clicks of sound, dots and dashes, and we have to translate them. This message seems so unbelievable that I have to make sure I have it right before I go to the captain and put the whole ship on alert."

"And are you sure now?"

Cottam nodded. "Yes, I am."

"Well, then," said Kate, "let's go. Where is the captain's cabin? I'll come with you."

Cottam shook his head. "There's no need."

"I want to."

"Why?"

A sudden gust of icy wind swirled out of the west and for one brief moment, Kate thought she heard the sound of a thousand screams. Cottam stood still. Their eyes met. Had the wind brought him the same certainty?

"Because I believe you," Kate said. "Lead the way."