



The HMS Titanic

By Eloise Burt

The wind brushed a few strands of hair onto my face as I strolled through the gardens. I just needed a break from home, to be honest. Father jabbering on about some cruise ride we are going on, Mother barely keeping her cool around little Cessil and James. I had barely gotten hold of my thoughts when I heard an angry voice call, "Louise Bennet! I surely cannot describe how much your younger brothers are..."

"It is okay, Mama," I smiled, "Where is Father?"

"OH...only minding his own business in the study!" She ran off, flustered and crying.

I rolled my eyes and walked lightly into the house.

The lamps were dimly lit and I could hear the anguished voices of my two little brothers coming from the living room. Mother was still sobbing frantically and my eldest sister, Rose, was attempting to comfort her, although I knew that she could not care less. Life was difficult with our family, sometimes. Other times I could not find a reason to be dissatisfied.

"Louise, dear! The cruise is tomorrow!" my father exclaimed excitedly.

Tomorrow? I could not say no now. After all, this cruise was the Titanic and Father was oh so excited about this one specific cruise, so I did not see how I could decline. It was only supposed to be around 137 hours, which is approximately 5 days. Then we would be in New York.

The Titanic was supposedly the safest and most impressive ship in Southampton. That was most certainly the only reason father was this worked up about it. I bet he could not wait to get back afterwards and boast about how much it cost, and how amazing everything was.

After supper that night (broccoli and coriander soup), I dashed upstairs to my bedroom and started to pack up my bag. 6 frocks and 2 of my best dresses. That should be enough. I continued to pack up as I thought about the cruise. Endless views of ocean, fine rooms, rich food... Perhaps this would not be a chore at all. Still imagining every amazing thing that could possibly happen, I clambered into my four – poster bed and drifted off into a dreamy sleep.

The next morning, I was abruptly awoken by Mother pulling open my curtains so vigorously that the stitches pulled apart very slightly at the seams. My eyes fought against my will to open whilst I grudgingly sat up.

"Louise - Elizabeth! We have precisely 5 hours until we are due to be on that ship! Your brothers have wound me up really well, they have. It was only Rose who bothered to sort them out! Not your own Father!"

Mother looked as though she was about to cry and dashed out of the room. I clambered out of bed, pulled off my nightgown and fumbled blindly around my closet for something to wear. My hand landed on a pale pink dress with lace stitching. Hoping that it was suitable, I pulled it on and walked over to the mirror to fix my hair. I was mostly looking forward to being in New York. Uncle William said he had been there before, and described it as one of the most extravagant places on earth. I must admit, after hearing of what he had described it as, I was most enthusiastic to go.

Father was the first downstairs. He bore a china cup of tea in his hand, which I presumed he had already drunk plenty of.

“Morning, Louise!” he said, beaming at me from across the room.

“Good morning, Father,” I smiled back at him.

“Morning, Louise! Morning Father! Where is Mother?” James had only just emerged from the staircase. I looked at Father, who had taken James around the shoulders and pulled him into a hug.

“Mother is upstairs. She is quite frantic about being prepared. I do not know what she expects, it is not like royalty will be boarding this ship!”

“Who has a clue?” Father said, staring outside the window.

“THOMAS! OH THOMAS! THE WEATHER IS INCLEMENT! I DARE SAY I HAD BETTER TAKE A BUCKET FOR CESSIL! WHAT IF HE IS SICK! WHAT IF...”

“Do calm yourself, my dear,” Father said, grinning. “Bring a bucket if you think it necessary,”

Mother ran upstairs hastily, yelling for Cessil, who was using her hairbrush as a teething toy.

The next few hours flew by. With Mother’s frantic rushing around, and Father’s calmness, 9 o’clock came by fairly quickly.

“Boat! Boat!” Cessil chanted as we climbed into the car. Rose and I exchanged glances as Mother began to yell about the unfortunate weather. The journey to The White Star Dock seemed to last hours, with shouts, whispers and singing to complete the journey.

By the time we arrived, there was a woman waiting at the entrance holding a parasol. She beckoned people in the line to come over, until it came to our turn to step forth.

“Tickets please, ma’am.” She looked at Mother.

“Well, I do have them in here somewhere,” Mother replied whilst rummaging around in her purse. “You see, hilarious story, I actually woke up and put them on my dresser and then forgot where they were, so I told myself look here, if they were there then they could be downstairs, or maybe on the counter! No, that would be so strange of me, I thought, and I said to Thomas...”

“I have them,” Rose said, pulling out 4 tickets.

“How old are you fine ladies?” the woman asked, looking at Rose and I.

“Just 19,” Rose said.

“Barely 15, ma’am,” I said, nodding. The woman smiled and stood aside.

The ship was huge. The complete bottom half of it was midnight black, only interrupted by a strip of white that sat neatly on top, and a thin layer of red that was underneath. Four huge smokestacks were evenly placed along the top of the ship and hundreds of windows lined the sides.

“269 metres, George!” A woman exclaimed, and I presumed she was talking about the ship. It did look around that size, in fact, it seemed almost daunting. It towered above me showing everyone it was in charge and ready for adventure.

“Right, we are cabins 81,82 and 83. Rose, Louise you are sharing and Cessil and James are too.”

“But Mother! Cessil will cry all night! He is two! Just a foolish child! He will make a right racket!”

“And you, James, are just nine. You are a child too! But surely you are capable!”

I watched as James frowned and ran angrily off ahead of us as we trod carefully onto the cruiser.

The inside was grand. Wooden steps snaked up the middle of the room, and chairs were neatly placed around the entrance. Patterned tiles glistened in the candle light and a statue of a young angel boy held a candle in its fist.

“This is truly spectacular!” Father exclaimed excitedly.

Rose smiled slightly, and gazed up in awe at the chandelier.

“That is very pretty, is it not Rose. I dare say even prettier than you!” Mother said graciously before walking on. Rose smiled and rolled her eyes before following her.

We soon found our cabins. Rose and I strolled into our room, acknowledging the finely decorated corridors at the same time.

“I dare say, Louise, this is one of the greatest things that has happened for years!”

“The coronation of King George was very admirable too,” I added, grinning. We had vast celebrations, and although it was a year ago, I remembered it like it were yesterday.

“Louise - Elizabeth!” Rose laughed, “I am talking about this year!”

“Make it more precise next time then,” I joked.

Our cabin was a suitable size, with two single beds set up on each side of a small window. A sofa sat to the right of them and several paintings lined the sage green coloured walls.

“This is sweet,” Rose exclaimed, but more to herself than to me. Then, a voice scared us at the door.

“Everything okay ladies?” A butler asked, curtly. We nodded and set our bags down on the beds.

“Drat, we are setting off!” Rose said, frantically.

“Have you forgotten anything? Oh, yes, we had better go up!” I said, realising that, if we did not move soon, we may miss our chance to say farewell to those still onshore.

Thousands of people were bustled up at the deck, shouting farewells and waving at their relatives or friends. “BYE JANE!” I yelled as I saw my closest friend was stood there waving at me. I could not see her reply, as *HMS Titanic* had set sail on her 5-day voyage to New York.

Supper came around quickly. Before we knew it, the sun was setting and the first day onboard was almost over. Cessil was barely awake, whilst James was eagerly explaining how he swore he had seen a shark circle the ship.

After a supper of lightly cooked crab, I went straight back to our cabin and decided to continue reading my novel.

No matter how hard he tried to prevent it, she left. He called for his true love to come back, but his fortune was against him. Fitz' dear Lydia could never return. Not when he was so poor now. But then fate hit him -

"Louise?" Rose stood in front of her bed. I barely noticed her come in.

"If I were you, I would get changed into a fine dress – did you know there was a ball tonight?"

I nodded and rummaged in my bag. I managed to find a pale beige dress with large, puffed out sleeves and a laced bodice. "Will this do?" I asked, doing a twirl whilst holding it flatly out in front of me. Rose did a mock gasp and clapped her hands together. I grinned and waved to her as she walked out of the room.

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I couldn't help taking in my surroundings as I walked down the staircase.

"I told you, Linett, April 10th a ball on the cruise! I told you, remember your frock and you forgot it!"

I could not help but overhear other's conversations as I walked past. It was only on the lower levels of the ship that you could feel it begin to rock, but when music was playing and you were dancing, you barely noticed. I had just caught Rose's eye and she came running over to me. Mother was wearing a faded orange dress and was dancing with Father, who wore a tailcoat and had his hair gelled back.

"Miss Louise – Elizabeth?" I turned around to see a girl, around my age standing behind me with a drink in one hand. Her mousy hair hung heavily below her shoulders and her white gloves matched her buttermilk-coloured frock. "Allow me to introduce myself. Dorothy Helenatce, pleased to make your acquaintance."

"Pleasure," I nodded and curtsied.

"I was just talking to your Mother. She seems quite the lively sort, do you not agree?"

I nodded again. I could not really agree to this, though. Lively seemed the complete opposite of Mother's personality!

"Good evening," she said, and did an awkward curtsy before walking off.

The rest of the evening consisted of much more dancing, talking and more people coming up to engage me in conversation. After a few hours, I decided to make my way up to the cabin.

Rose was already up there asleep. I thought it strange, but then again it had been a tiring day. So, I got into my nightgown and fell asleep.

The next few days flew by. Rose and I went out every morning to walk along the deck, and we tried to make it a daily thing that we wear similar clothes, sometimes even matching. Dorothy tried to socialise with us many times, but it always felt awkward and uncomfortable. I did sympathise with the girl, as her parents paid her not the least bit of attention and spent most of their time attending to each other. I felt lucky at one point with my own situation of bickering parents, when I caught them feeding each other cucumber from the other person's fork. It was on the third day of the voyage that Dorothy found another girl, Margaret, and they became close friends. Surprisingly, I could not help feeling a bit jealous when Dorothy practically forgot about me.

At dinner that day, I caught Mother complaining to an attendant about her door.

“It gets jammed, you see. Sometimes it will not even open, so we have had to use the door connecting to my son’s room instead. It is terrible! We paid good money for this trip, and I cannot appreciate this. Fix it or I shall request a refund!”

I rolled my eyes and returned to my garden salad. That evening, Rose and I played a game of scrabble. It was ocean scrabble that we had bought along as we thought the coordination was fun, however it was not fun when the words “sink” and “tsunami” appeared. We both went to bed fairly early that night, and as usual, I fell asleep just as quickly as the other times.

The following morning, April the 14th, I woke abruptly. I did not know why, but I must have slept in longer than anybody else. Rose was already downstairs in the saloon eating her breakfast when I arrived, and she greeted me like a long-lost friend when I sat down at the table. “Had an extra few hours sleep, Louise?” she exclaimed as I had collected my food and began to eat.

“I tell you what, we should stay up fairly late tonight don’t you agree? I mean, it is one of our last days on the ship, so why not make it count? I say we tell stories in bed. I must write in my journal about yesterday, and then we will have a fine time!”

That afternoon, I played the piano in the main hall for an hour. I must admit, I had improved a lot, and although I could not sing along, I got a large round of applause at the end.

After supper, I eagerly met Rose upstairs in our cabin.

“Are you ready for the scariest stories yet?” she asked excitedly.

I laughed and listened. I listened for such a long time, that I became too tired to listen to much more. “Someone’s had an accident in the kitchen!” Rose joked as a smell of random burning came to our senses.

Then at about 11.40pm, it happened. The whole ship shook. Horrified whispers erupted from all around us and I immediately stood up to see what was going on.

It must have collided with something, but I could not quite tell what.

Rose looked at me. I had never seen her so scared in my entire life.

“GIRLS? GIRLS! GIRLS ARE YOU OKAY?” Father yelled from his cabin.

We could not speak. Fear paralysed us.

“This is your Captain speaking. Please do not be alarmed. Everything will be okay,” the Captain said. “If everybody could make their way to the top deck, the crew will direct you. Be British!”

Everyone silenced at once. The people stopped their hysterics. Almost hoping it was a dream, I followed Rose up to the top deck. All around us, people were muttering prayers and bustling around the boat. We could feel it shaking beneath our feet now, and I could not help feeling scared. There must have been at least one time in the following few hours that Rose and I attempted to help out, but the familiar call of, “Save yourselves, fine women!” filled our ears, distracting us from our intentions.

Hours passed. The bottom half of the ship was submerged under the icy water, and we could feel it descending even further. I had just gripped onto the rail again, when a panicked voice startled me.

“LOUISE! LOUISE!” Rose was screaming in my ear. People were wailing all around us, and I could feel vibrations beneath my feet. “THE ENGINEERS ARE FIGHTING TO KEEP THE LIGHTS WORKING! WE HAVE TO MOVE!” she continued.

I had no time to complain. Rose dragged me up by my hand and we stood at the front of the deck.

The ship was failing. It was lunging to one side and people had to grip the rails to hold on. Rose and I took a bar each, and we watched as Mother and Father appeared with our younger brothers.

Then, as if nothing could get any worse, there was a deafening *crash*. The ship had split in half. Anguished screams and splashes sounded from all around us. All I could do was look around to check that Rose was still there.

“NOOOO!” Mother was screaming. Cessil was screaming. James was screaming.

Father was gone...

“THE BAR – IT...” Mother gasped.

Then, a man grabbed me by the waist and threw me in the direction of the escape ladder. It was the captain.

“CLIMB!” He told me. Although numb, I descended down the rickety ladder and landed painfully in the centre of a lifeboat. At that moment, the power of the ship went out.

“ROSE! MOTHER! CESSIL? JAMES!”

Rose landed in a heap on the area in front of me. I pulled her up and hugged her. Tears fell, thick and fast, from my eyes as I choked on my words.

“Mother and our brothers are safe on another boat -” she spluttered.

Then, just as I thought everybody would be safe, the last of the ship sank before my eyes. There was no evidence of the Titanic ever being there. I sobbed and let my head fall onto Rose’s arm, as I stared out at the cold place where the cruiser should have been.

One month later

I woke up to see Rose awake beside me. The orphanage seemed warmer than it had ever done before, and as I went to read my book, I saw that Rose’s journal was wide open.

Why did Mother give us up? Just because Father is gone does not determine her children’s fate? Why? Why?

“I love you, Rose,” I called. I felt this way too, and I knew Cessil and James were struggling to take this in as well. Rose had always been so close to Mother - I understood how hard this was.

Just after we were escorted home on the night of the sinking, Mother made the decision to give us up and live the rest of her life mourning Father. She writes letters to Rose and I once a month, and we look forward to receiving them – she has even promised to continue writing to Rose when she

moves out from this orphanage. Rose is nearly twenty, therefore she shall be expected to lead a life of her own and get married.

“I love you too, Louise.” Rose’s eyes shined at me. I walked over to her and sat on the end of her bed.

“You know, you never got to finish your story. That one you began on the ship. I must admit, I had become quite interested,”

Rose looked at me for a while. Then, she sat me down, and pulled me into a hug.

I would never let my loved ones go.

Never.

Never again.