

NEW YORK TIMES bestselling author of *THE FALSE PRINCE*

JENNIFER A. NIELSEN

ICEBERG



*Bound for disaster,
the Titanic carries
many secrets . . .*

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*For Johan Svensson, a distant cousin and
third-class passenger, who at age 14 snuck
onto the boat deck and finally made it onto
Lifeboat 13. Thanks for your courage.*

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.

Finally, it was my turn in line at the ticket booth. “Third-class ticket,” I told the woman inside the booth. “Traveling alone, and I’m willing to share a room if they don’t snore too loud.”

She had frowned back at me and answered, “Three pounds.”

Mum had given me a shoulder bag to hold the money, and enough food for my walk, so I’d spent nothing along the way. But I knew there were barely over two pounds inside the bag. Not enough.

I asked the woman, “How much if they do snore loud?”

“Prices in third class go up to eight pounds.” She frowned at me, then looked at the person in line behind me. “Next, please.”

And just like that, I was out of the line.

I turned to face the ship again. The easiest answer to the “what now” question looming ahead of me was to return home. After all, I had the perfect excuse.

But then I remembered Mum’s last words to me before I left.

She had hugged me tight, then said, “If I didn’t believe this is the only way to save our family, I wouldn’t give you up for anything in the world.”

I needed to get on board that ship. With or without a ticket.

I wouldn’t get through on the third-class gangplank. The officers taking tickets were watching for stowaways, for on a few occasions I saw passengers slinking back down the

gangplank, obviously turned away. That's what would happen to me. There had to be another way.

I was so intent on studying the ship that I jumped when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned to see a rather pretty girl in a light blue dress with a lace collar and with a very fine hat over her long blonde hair, curled at the ends. If she stood still enough, I'd almost have believed she was a museum painting.

In my first look at her, I already understood who she was. Mum said some people breathed wealth. They inhaled air but exhaled money, getting richer almost without trying. This girl breathed wealth.

"Pardon me," she said, "but I've become separated from my governess. Have you seen her? A tall, slender woman, dressed all in black."

"I haven't seen her." I tried to speak with the same polite tone as she had used, but my words sounded as ordinary as I was, standing in my coarse fabric dress without a single stitch of lace, and an old coat that had belonged to Papa, too long for me. I had no hat, and my brown hair would've been in tangles if I had not taken the trouble this morning to pull it into two braids.

The girl smiled kindly. "My name is Sylvia Thorngood."

I arched a brow. "Any relation to Edgar Thorngood?"

"He's my father."

I couldn't stop my jaw from dropping wide open. Everyone knew that name, even here in England. The family fortune was said to be worth over a million dollars.

"What's your name?" Sylvia asked.

"Hazel Rothbury."

“Rothbury.” She spoke slowly, letting my name flow over her tongue as if a slow pronunciation would help her recall which of her father’s wealthy friends I was related to.

The answer was simple: none of them.

Still, Sylvia widened her smile. “I am very happy to meet you. Are you boarding the ship as well?”

“Yes, I’m traveling to America.” I’d already noted the difference in our accents. “You must be going home.”

“I am. I’ve been in England with my governess, visiting my grandparents. Who will you be visiting in America?”

I opened my mouth but had no idea how to answer. It was humiliating to explain that my journey would end in a garment factory, changing bobbins or threading needles for ten hours a day. Sylvia was looking at me like a friend. I didn’t want her to think of me as a servant.

So I only said, “I’ll be staying with my aunt in New York.” That was the most I wanted to say about that.

“There is so much to see and do in New York,” she said. “You will have such a wonderful time!”

“Miss Thorngood, there you are!” The woman hurrying toward us was tall and rail thin with graying hair pulled back into a tight bun, and wearing layers of black. Either she was in mourning, or else miserable old spinsters had inspired her sad fashion choices.

“My apologies, Miss Gruber. I became lost, but now I’ve met a new friend.” Sylvia gestured to me. “Miss Hazel Rothbury is headed to New York to stay with her aunt. Perhaps we could have them over for supper one evening.”

I flushed with embarrassment and quietly said, “I don’t think . . . my aunt would not know your family.”

“The Thorngoods know everyone . . . in New York’s high society.” Miss Gruber eyed the shoulder bag at my side. “No luggage?”

“I had a long walk here. Couldn’t pack much with me.”

“And you have a ticket?”

I couldn’t admit the truth, not with Miss Gruber already looking down on me, literally. So I nodded. “Of course I do.”

Sylvia clapped her hands together. “I have a lovely idea. Let’s not wait until we reach New York to know each other better. Perhaps one evening you might join us on the ship. There won’t be many people on board our age, so let’s decide to be friends now.”

“That would be fun,” I agreed, though I had no intention of ever meeting her for a meal. I’d feel lucky enough just to get onto this ship.

“Miss Rothbury will likely be too busy washing and ironing her dress to have time for a supper,” Miss Gruber observed.

That might be true. On my walk to Southampton, I had slept in a barn each night, and often tramped through the cold rain along muddy roads.

If Miss Gruber understood why my dress was dirty, maybe she would not have been so sharp with me now. Or maybe she was so sharp *because* she understood that, because the very fact that I had been bold enough to speak to her ward was offense enough.

“Come now, Miss Thorngood,” Miss Gruber said. “Have a pleasant voyage, Miss Rothbury.”

The tone of her voice was unmistakable. She didn’t care whether my voyage was pleasant or the greatest disaster in a century. She just didn’t want me to interfere with *her* voyage.

I waved goodbye, then headed toward the stern of the ship, where passengers had deposited their trunks and large pieces of baggage to be transported into the *Titanic*’s cargo hold. Crewmen were busy loading each piece, but each time they left with a piece of luggage, I had two or three minutes to look around.

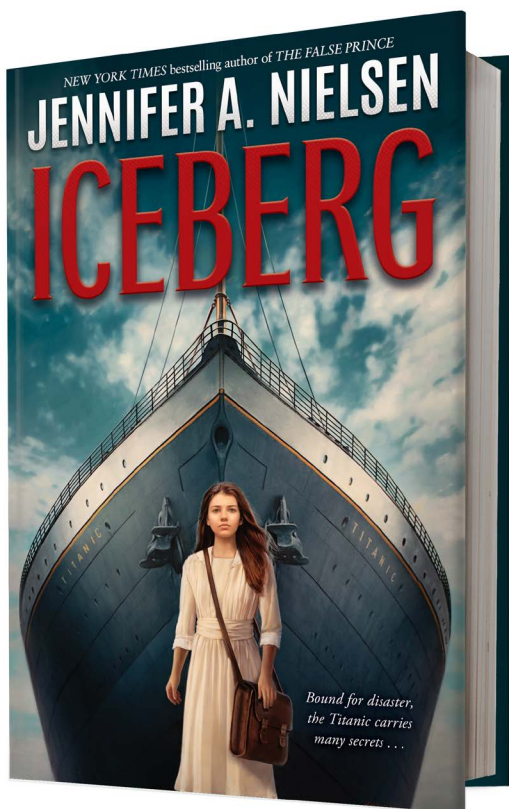
Most of the trunks I saw were locked from the outside or had exterior latches. Finally, I found a simpler one that merely closed. I opened it and saw it filled with a woman’s clothes. It took some effort to fit inside and still have room to breathe, but I did it, and lowered the lid without being noticed.

This was a terrible idea. I knew that as well as I knew this was breaking the law, a disgrace to my family’s good reputation, and likely was a fair amount dangerous.

But it was the only plan I had. Several minutes later, the trunk was picked up by a crewman, who then called, “Oi, this one’s heavy. Lend a hand, mate?”

A second crewman came to pick up the trunk, and before I knew it, I was being carried on board the *Titanic*.

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