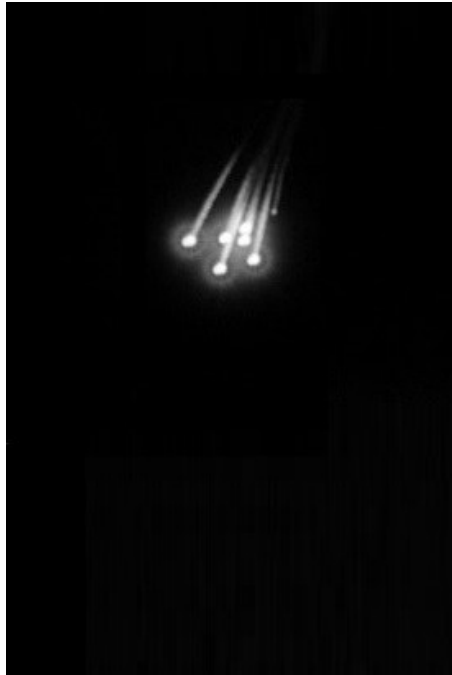


PROLOGUE

It was a little more than an hour since the RMS *Titanic*, the pride of the White Star Line on her maiden voyage to New York, came into contact with a giant floating mass of ice along her starboard side. A ship considered by some to be unsinkable, was now taking in water at a rate of nearly 300 tons per minute in six of her forward compartments. As the vessel was slowly settling down by the head, her crew was frantically involved with loading her too few lifeboats mostly with reluctant women and children, and slowly lowering them to the dark, icy cold waters below.

“Suddenly a rush of light from the forward deck, a hissing roar that made us all turn from watching the boats, and a rocket leapt upwards to where the stars blinked and twinkled above us. Up it went, higher and higher, with a sea of faces upturned to watch it, and then an explosion that seemed to split the silent night in two, and a shower of stars sank slowly down and went out one by one. And with a gasping sigh one word escaped the lips of the crowd: ‘Rockets!’”



“Anybody knows what rockets at sea mean. And presently another, and then a third. It is no use denying the dramatic intensity of the scene: separate it if you can from all the terrible events that followed, and picture the calmness of the night, the sudden light on the decks crowded with people in different stages of dress and undress, the background of huge funnels and tapering masts revealed by the soaring rocket, whose flash illumined at the same time the faces and minds of the obedient crowd, the one with mere physical light, the other with a sudden revelation of what its message was. Every one knew without being told that we were calling for help from any one who was near enough to see.” – Lawrence Beesley, Second Class Passenger, RMS *Titanic*.

Several miles to the northward lay the Leyland liner *Californian*, a tramp steamer headed for Boston that had been stopped since about 10:20pm near the edge of a vast expanse of floating ice that blocked her path to the west, stretching from north to south as far as the eye could see.

“At about 12.45, I observed a flash of light in the sky just above that steamer. I thought nothing of it as there were several shooting stars about, the night being fine and clear with light airs and calms. Shortly after I observed another distinctly over the steamer which I made out to be a white rocket though I observed no flash on the deck or any indication that it had come from that steamer, in fact, it appeared to come from a good distance beyond her. Between then and about 1.15 I observed three more the same as before, and all white in colour. I, at once, whistled down the speaking tube and you [Captain Lord] came from the chartroom into your own room and answered. I reported seeing these lights in the sky in the direction of the other steamer which appeared to me to be white rockets.” – Herbert Stone, Second Officer, SS *Californian*.