

S A R A H J A N E

MAIDEN  
VOYAGE

*A Titanic Story*

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# ISABELLA JAMES

**3:00 a.m. Wednesday, April 10, 1912**

“Hurry now,” Isabella James’s mother rushed her out the door and into the cold, damp predawn air. “We can’t be late.” She hoisted a full carpetbag onto her arm.

*Late for what?* Isabella wondered. The tightness in her mother’s voice kept her from asking the question aloud. She stumbled into the London streets and blinked, letting her eyes adjust to the dark. There were no streetlights in their neighborhood, and her thin coat did little to ward off the biting spring cold. She longed to crawl right back into her bed, the only warm place in the tiny apartment she shared with her parents, but the door was already closed and she could hear her father turning the key.

Isabella's mother clutched her hand as they began to move in a small herd through the streets of East London. It was clear that they had a destination, that her mother was leading them somewhere.

Isabella fleetingly wondered if her parents had found her a job. Things had been hard lately. The coal strike seemed unending, and her father hadn't worked in weeks. And worse, Isabella was concerned he would not be healthy enough to return to the mines when the strike ended. She heard her father cough, as if agreeing with her thoughts.

Of course Isabella would have been more than happy to work, to do whatever she could to put food on the table and a fire in the stove. Already she was assisting her mother taking in laundry and sewing, though she knew it was not enough. She honestly hoped her family had found her a job. But what sort of job required leaving home in the middle of the night?

And what sort of job required a packed carpetbag?

Isabella hurried to keep up with her mother's rapid pace. She turned back to her father, who was lagging and breathing heavily. "Are you all right, Papa?" she asked quietly.

Francis James nodded, punctuating the gesture with another ragged cough. Worry seeped into Isabella like the

damp cold. Her chest was tight, her mouth full of unspoken words.

“Mother, we’re moving too quickly,” she said softly. Her mother slowed for an instant, but only an instant.

“We have no choice,” she answered, her voice a high-pitched squeak. “We mustn’t miss the train.”

*The train?*

Isabella squinted, trying to see her mother’s face, to read something in her eyes. Though the black sky was turning gray with the promise of dawn, it was still dark. She could not make out her expression, but saw her raise a hand to her cheek, to wipe at something shiny. Isabella sucked in her breath. She had never seen her mother cry.

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## LUCY MILES

**11:30 a.m. Wednesday, April 10, 1912**

“The ship’s been fitted out with every luxury imaginable and they say she’s absolutely unsinkable!”

Lucy Miles overheard the excitement of the passengers around her as they crossed the elevated gangplank and moved toward the first-class entrance of the White Star Line’s glorious *Titanic*. Not only was she the largest ship ever built, she was the grandest. And she was brand-new!

Lucy linked her arm through her mother’s. “Did you hear that, Mama?” she asked in a cheerful voice. “That gentleman said the *Titanic* is unsinkable!” Lucy hoped the words would comfort her mother. “Isn’t that right, Father?” She looked over her shoulder at her father with a broad smile,

hoping he would offer some reassurance of his own. Her mother was easily overwhelmed—especially lately—and what with the noise, the train ride to Southampton, the crowds swirling below them, and the seven-day sea crossing ahead, Elisabeth Miles already looked rather pale.

“Father?” Lucy repeated a bit louder. But Phillip Miles didn’t seem to hear her. He was staring intently into the crowd of people below who had come to see the massive ship off on its maiden voyage, as though looking for something. Or someone. Lucy’s smile faded as she studied his face. His moustache was so large it hid most of his mouth, but it was not big enough to cover his twisted scowl.

*Never mind*, Lucy told herself, turning back to her mother and the massive *Titanic*. Her father just needed to get away from London, to leave his business concerns behind. Once he sailed away from the day-to-day distractions, the three of them would be able to have the family holiday she had longed and waited for. After all, they were traveling to America! To New York City, where her mother had been born. Lucy was looking forward to staying with her uncle Julian and aunt Millie, and all of her cousins.

Lucy felt her mother teeter a bit on the gangplank, and deftly steadied her. “What is it?” she asked, following her

mother's backward gaze. Elisabeth did not answer, but it was clear that her husband's scowl had caused the misstep. Lucy opened her mouth to speak, trying to think of something to distract her mother from her father's pronounced sourness, when Abby O'Rourke, their new maid, spoke first.

"Oh, look, Lady Elisabeth!" the maid cried, her blue eyes wide. She shifted one of the hatboxes she was carrying—they were too delicate to leave to the stewards—so she could point to a gray-striped cat making her way down another, far less busy gangplank below them with a kitten in her mouth. The small mama cat made the trip three times as the Miles party made their way slowly up the other gangplank, settling each of her babies in an empty cargo crate on the dock.

"She's a diligent mother, isn't she?" Elisabeth noted.

"Indeed," Abby replied. "Although I wonder why she's disembarking with her little family before we've even set sail?"

"Perhaps the *Titanic* is so new there aren't enough mice on board to keep the kittens fed," Lucy offered, turning back to her mother. But Elisabeth wasn't looking at the cats



any longer. She was gazing intently into the crowd of people below.

“Phillip, that man there. He’s calling your name,” she said, pointing at someone in the crowd.

Indeed, the man in the crowd was hard to miss. He was large and rough-looking, with a broad face. He waved his arms angrily and shouted, “Miles! Phillip Miles!”

Lucy turned to her father to ask who the man was, but he didn’t acknowledge her. He focused his attention in the precise opposite direction, and appeared suddenly eager to get to the top of the gangplank and through the carved double doors.

Looking back, Lucy caught sight of the man once more and saw him take off his cap and wave it in the air, signaling someone else while still pointing at her father. She tried to look in the direction the man was waving and thought she saw a second red-faced man lifting his chin to signal back, but her view was cut off when her father stepped in front of her and entered the *Titanic*.

“My, my, what a ship!” he exclaimed, his scowl turning into a stiff smile. “White Star clearly spared no expense on this enormous tub!”

Lucy thought *tub* was an odd word for such a glorious liner, but she had to agree with her father's assessment as she joined him inside the lovely white-paneled room. The carved ceilings, the plush carpet, the turned bannisters . . . everything was opulent down to the tiniest details! The *Titanic* was so ornate she felt as if she'd boarded a floating palace, and all thoughts of the shouting man promptly disappeared.