

CHAPTER ONE



RMS *TITANIC*

FRIDAY, APRIL 12, 1912, 4:50 P.M.

“But, Mrs. Rankin!” the steward exclaimed in confusion. “You have four sons, not five!”

Five boys, ranging in age from six years old to seventeen, lined up in descending order of height in front of the bunk beds in the narrow third-class cabin.

“I think I know my own children, Mr. Steptoe,” the slight, red-haired woman replied. “Aidan, Curran, Patrick, Finnbar, and Sean — he’s the wee one.”

“The reason I’m asking,” the steward stammered, flustered, “is Second Officer Lightoller believes there may be a stowaway on board the *Titanic* —”

“So he sent you down to the steerage, because where else could a lawbreaker be?” she finished coldly.

“I’m merely saying,” Steptoe soldiered on patiently, “that it’s my recollection that you boarded in Queenstown with your *four* sons — three here in the

cabin with you, and your older boy in the forward berths, with the single men.”

“Then your recollection is wrong.” Mrs. Rankin may have been small, but raising a family by herself in County Kilkenny had made her tough. “I may not be a millionaire like your John Jacob Astor up in first class, but you have no right to interrogate me in the peace of my own cabin.”

“Madam, your stubbornness would be astonishing in the most obstinate mule!” The steward’s face was red with frustration. “I shall return with the passenger manifest and prove that I am right!” He stormed out, slamming the hatch behind him.

Paddy Burns, age fourteen, stepped out of the line of boys. He was fair of complexion, and dressed like the younger Rankins, in a plain work shirt, breeches, and knee socks. But he was not one of them. Was it really only ten days ago that he had been living on the streets of Belfast, picking pockets to survive? The great *Titanic* had been nothing more than an immense form under construction in a slip at Harland and Wolff. The four towering smokestacks had cast shadows over Paddy, Daniel, and half the city.

Daniel, the best friend a lad could ever have. Dead because of my mistake . . .

He shook his head to clear it. All the sorrow in the

world wouldn't bring Daniel back. Besides, it wasn't the Rankins' problem. The family had risked a lot to protect Paddy from the crew. Harboring a stowaway was a serious crime.

"That steward will be back, he will," Paddy fretted. "And he'll bring the passenger records to *prove* how many there are in your party."

Mrs. Rankin was unworried. "We'll tell him he must be soft in the head, because that's what we've been saying all along. *He* was the one who had it backward."

"But —"

She awarded him a motherly smile. "We Irish haven't survived all these years under the English because we're stupid and weak."

Paddy nodded slowly. "First the clothes, and now protecting me — I don't know how I'll ever repay you."

"You'll repay me by making a life for yourself in America," she assured him. "The English can steal our crops and tell us there's a famine. But our spirit — *that* they'll never take, not even with their soldiers and their guns. Now off you go, before Mr. High and Mighty comes back."

Paddy stepped out into the third-class passageway. In the days since he'd become an accidental stowaway aboard the *Titanic*, he'd explored every inch of

the magnificent vessel. Steerage was not nearly as opulent and luxurious as first class or even second. But the entire ship was brand new — clean and freshly painted. And, he reflected ruefully, he'd only seen a grand total of three rats — far fewer than he and Daniel had chased out of the abandoned print shop they had made their home back in Belfast.

Belfast. It already seemed a million miles away, and a hundred years ago.

Make a life for yourself. . . . Mrs. Rankin's words echoed in his mind. Did Paddy even deserve a life after what his heedlessness had done to Daniel? Perhaps not. But the world continued to turn, and the ship continued to sail. He had to live in the here and now, not in the past. If surviving made little sense, the alternative made that much less.

So, to the matter at hand. He needed somewhere to go — a place where Lightoller and the other officers would not find him.

But first he had an errand to run.

He found a companion stairway that led up to E Deck, and hurried forward along the wide corridor nicknamed Scotland Road.

As he walked past crew members, he fancied that their eyes were scanning him. It made him nervous. But, he reasoned, the stowaway had been last seen

wearing a steward's uniform. Clothed as a third-class boy, he should be safe enough — unless he ran into Lightoller or one of the sailors who had seen him up close.

He rounded the corner and approached the office of the master-at-arms. Word had traveled around the ship that two second-class passengers had been locked in the brig for attempted murder, most foul. Paddy knew all about it, because he was the one who had nearly been killed.

Flattening himself to the bulkhead, he peered in through the doorway. The desk was deserted. Boldly, he took a step inside and turned to face the detention cells.

There they were: Kevin Gilhooley, brother of the most powerful gangster in Belfast, and beside him, a hulking bodyguard with a thrice-broken nose, Seamus.

“You look good behind bars,” Paddy said with satisfaction. These were the two who had killed Daniel, and had recently tried to pitch Paddy off the top deck of the *Titanic*.

“You’re a lucky little rat — I’ll give you that,” growled Gilhooley. “But luck won’t stop this boat from reaching New York. And then you’re mine.”

“And mine,” added Seamus in a nasal voice.

Paddy stuck his jaw out defiantly. “You’ll never touch me! You’re going to jail for what you did!”

“You think the Americans will be interested in what happened aboard a ship half a world away?” Gilhooley shook his head. “Enjoy your sweet voyage, boy. Use their gymnasium and have yourself a real Turkish steam bath. Because when I get my hands on you, you’re going to squeal like your little friend in the Belfast shipyards.”

To hear Kevin Gilhooley talking about Daniel’s murder — *bragging* about it — turned Paddy’s rational thoughts into a blind rage. He snatched the pitcher of ice water from the desk and flung it at the cell.

There was a crash as the glass shattered against the bars, sloshing a torrent of water and broken shards over Gilhooley. The shocked howl that exploded from the gangster’s throat came as much from the icy deluge as from anger at Paddy.

“*Guard!*”

Paddy darted out of the office, moving away from Scotland Road, where crew members were sure to hear Gilhooley’s bellowing and come running. He hurried up a small companion staircase past D Deck to C and paused, catching his breath.

A well-dressed gentleman in a dark suit shot him a disapproving glance as he walked by.

He was in first class now — he could tell by the luxurious thickness of the carpeting, the paneled walls, and gleaming brass fixtures. Dressed like a common urchin from steerage, he stood out like a sore thumb.

Third-class passengers were not allowed in this domain of millionaires. That made no difference to Paddy — strictly speaking, he wasn't allowed *anywhere*. Still, if he were caught and questioned, sooner or later someone would realize that he and the mysterious stowaway happened to be one and the same.

He had to get out of here. But where could he go? He couldn't head below. At that very moment, a search party could be forming on E Deck. And going up would only bring him farther into the rarefied air of first class.

He caught a flash of navy blue at the end of the passageway — the color of the officers' uniforms. Paddy froze. Lightoller?

No, but not much better — Fifth Officer Lowe, known for his megaphone voice and firecracker temper.

Paddy looked around desperately. The corridor

offered no hiding places, only solid bulkheads and locked staterooms.

In the opposite direction down the hall, a maid was wheeling a canvas bin, collecting linens. He watched as she knocked on a cabin door, opened it with a passkey, and disappeared inside.

The decision was made in the blink of an eye. Paddy sprinted along the passageway and dove into the cart, burrowing deep into a collection of large, thirsty bath towels. A moment later, the maid emerged. A few more towels were tossed on top, and the cart began to roll again.

He held his breath, waiting for the sound of pounding feet on the carpet. Then his cover would be cast aside, and Lowe would be glaring down at him. . . .

It didn't happen. The hamper stopped. More linens were added, and they were moving once more.

He shifted his position and felt a corner of folded paper scratch against his skin. He had doggedly held the drawing to his chest ever since Belfast. He was not at all certain why. He both loved and hated this weathered page. Loved it because it had come from Daniel. Hated it because it had cost Daniel his life.

Mr. Thomas Andrews himself — creator of this great ship — had challenged Daniel to imagine a way the unsinkable *Titanic* might sink. And Daniel had

succeeded! At least, Paddy thought he had. Try as he might, Paddy could not make head or tail of his friend's strange sketch. Daniel had been so much more than the street lad that fate had made him. He was cleverer than the designers and engineers who built ocean liners.

Paddy's thoughts darkened. Daniel had been murdered while trying to deliver this drawing to Mr. Andrews. And in that way, Paddy cursed it — just as he cursed himself for bringing Kevin Gilhooley down upon them.

Paddy's reverie was interrupted by the rattle of a gate, followed by the maid's voice: "B Deck, please." And then they were rising.

Paddy had never been on a real electric elevator before this voyage, but it was a common thing for the *Titanic's* passengers. The liner had three of them.

So he was away from Fifth Officer Lowe. It was good news, but it also introduced a larger problem. Up here, in the heart of first class, how was he ever going to get out of this linen bin?

He was trapped in the lap of luxury.