

Sealed Orders: a Titanic survivor's classic tale of love and fate

by Helen Churchill Candee

ET Research

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Introduction by Randy Bryan Bigham

Divorcee, women's rights advocate, political insider, sports enthusiast, world traveler and — long before the advent of the flapper — a cigarette-smoking flirt....

Not by any imaginative stretch could Helen Churchill Candee (nee Hungerford, 1858-1949) be called a conventional Victorian lady. Yet the distinguished Washington, D.C. social leader, known for her beauty and charm, never lost her respectability, her grace or her determined way on the trail she blazed to achieve independence and success.

To strike out on her own as a pioneering interior designer, art critic, consultant, writer and lecturer, may have come easily for one whose adventurous forebears landed at Plymouth on the *Mayflower*. Still, to her contemporaries, Helen Churchill Candee defied description.

It was unusual enough for a wealthy woman to apply her good taste and knowledge to advising architects, manufacturers and private clients on decorating. But Helen also reported on rural community betterment, childcare and etiquette for common household magazines, even wrote a “how-to” book on female autonomy through wage-earning.

Her early journalistic work almost always touched on women's emancipation. Apropos of the suffrage issue, Helen wrote in 1894 that “change and progression are the watchwords of the times,” that the traditional view of women having “no ambition higher than a replete preserve-cupboard” was wrong. She said the modern woman must learn “there is more in life than she has been extracting,” that she must “let her mind apply itself to larger regions of thought.”

So what was she about, this globetrotting pretty lady of good family and lofty connections, who liked to expound on bourgeois issues of gender and status? Why wasn't she content in her urban high-life, presiding at the tea table or organizing charity tableaux?

She was certainly unusual. Unlike most men and women of her social position, Candee's wealth and breeding didn't prevent her recognizing the evils of class privilege and discrimination.

“Theoretically, the fundamental social rule of our Republic is the equality of all persons,”



Helen Churchill Candee in a circa 1908 portrait.

Candee observed. “Practically, we are unreasoning snobs.”

She advised readers to fight “iron-bound prejudices” and cease with “endless insistence on unimportant customs.” These, she maintained, accomplished nothing but an “obliteration of individuality.”

Today Helen is still hard to peg. A mother of a doting son and daughter, she likewise delighted in her children, finding in them much of the inspiration for her democratic views.

“Children know nothing of principalities or powers,” she wrote in 1901, “and would be as ready to make a grab at the mustache of the German Emperor as at their mother's apron strings.”

But she craved solitude and study as well, escaping to exotic lands for months together to write, paint and, as she put it, “enjoy nature and avoid humanity.” Normally reserved and gracious, she could be outspoken and demanding. An intellectual to the core, happily ensconced in the quietude of libraries and museums, she also sought distraction in fellowship, levity and a great deal of romance.

“Without romance,” she asked, “what would our lives be?” Admitting that youth was the playground of love, Helen stipulated that “no woman is so old that in her heart she has outgrown the habit of being a girl.”

The contradictions in her personality were the contradictions of her era — a time of societal ferment and transformation in the role of women, the status of the lower class, and the spread of science and media. The Victorians and Edwardians were struggling with the past to address the future, old attitudes and morals were colliding with the new.

Perhaps the ultimate symbol of this cultural collision in the opening years of the 20th century was an event in which man and nature literally impacted — and Helen had a front row seat to the duel.

The ocean liner *Titanic*, largest, most technologically advanced in the world, laden with millionaires and emigrants, the famous and the obscure, modern ideas and outmoded methods, struck an iceberg one night and sank, destroying lives, shaking up values and changing the world. Among the few survivors, Helen saw the sun rise on the residue of a fight that nature won:

Dawn showed the vast reaches of the sea, empty of big craft. But floating near, a swaying tangle of deck chairs and cushions, and a pale white babe rocked in the cradle of that fashioning. The sun lingered on coming on such a scene.

The dawn illuminated more than the ruin of man's engineering triumph, or the deaths of 1,500 people, but the arrival of a new, uneasy era, a place that, like the once unassuming iceberg, was no longer innocent, gentle or safe.

The harrowing wreck of the super liner on its maiden voyage in 1912, though officially a footnote to history, has never lost its power to fascinate. In a pop-culture sense, *Titanic* never went down. Its tangibility struck a chord, and over the decades the public has thrilled to countless books, films and plays about the disaster.

It is unavoidable then that Helen Churchill Candee, despite her busy life as a society hostess, design authority, journalist, and political activist, should be best remembered for the part she played in one of the great dramas of history.

Her fame is rooted almost entirely in the classic tale she penned for *Collier's Weekly*. Appearing as the May 4, 1912 cover story in *Collier's*, it was one of the first in-depth eyewitness

accounts of the sinking to be published in a major magazine. It was certainly one of the most widely read first-hand stories, as *Collier's* circulation was among the highest of American weeklies.

Written in Helen Candee's refined way, the article was still more personal than anything she ever published. Depending on readers' tastes, Helen's long essay was either stirringly beautiful or excessively poetic. Called "Sealed Orders," the theme was the omnipotence of God and His orchestration of the convergence of three unwitting craft upon the sea — iceberg, *Titanic* and the rescue ship *Carpathia*, players in a game of life, hubris and death.

Candee wrote from her heart, and it showed. Nothing about the ship or the people she met escaped her memory. A mother with her children standing in the breeze on the steerage deck as the ship set out. The enthusiasm of *Titanic's* athletics instructor as he bounced around the gymnasium, showing off exercise equipment to passengers. The glittering scene at dinner on *Titanic's* last night afloat. The sad sight of the engine-room crew being turned away from lifeboats as the evacuation began.

Helen also paid homage to the ship's orchestra. As *Titanic* went down, the band's music was "freighted with a burden of love," she said, sending a message of "courage from man to man, cheering others while itself faced death."

But Helen held back on some aspects of her personal story, such as her reason for being aboard. It's now known that her son had been in an accident and she was hurrying back from a European business trip to be with him. She was also discreet — even tantalizingly vague — when referring to fellow passengers.

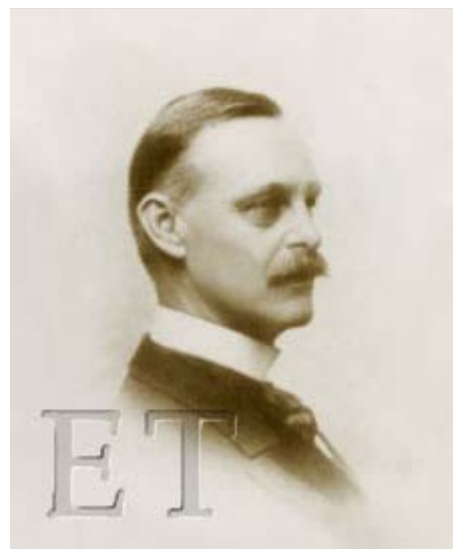
It has since become a sort of parlor game for researchers to identify the men and women to whom Candee refers anonymously in her narrative. The more famous of the travelers she describes — i.e., "the richest man," "the artist of renown," "the man of theatrical success," etc. — are fairly obvious to most readers but special insight, or at least an educated guess, is required to distinguish other characters in the story. Who, for instance, is the "prettiest girl" she mentions? Who are "the handsome woman," her "fine son" and his "adorable wife?"

In that strange, lost rite of decorum called chivalry, a corps of gentlemen appointed themselves Helen's protectors on the voyage. These dapper heroes have all been identified. Known as "Our Coterie," the six-member international team, with Helen their gilded centerpiece, included three New Yorkers, Col. Archibald Gracie, playboy Clinch Smith and architect Edward Kent. Rounding out the suave group were E.P. Colley, an Irish civil engineer, Bjornstrom Steffanson, a Swedish military officer and Hugh Woolner, a British businessman.

Two members of "Our Coterie," Woolner and Kent, became especially fond of Candee, and her depiction of a romantic interest in "Sealed Orders" is likely an amalgam of these men, the "He of the Two" of her narrative. It was a fittingly feminine tribute to their self-sacrifice and devotion.

"We all love a gentleman," she said some years later. "Time has nothing to do with effacing that."

Neither has time effaced the appeal of her 1912 tale.



Architect Edward Kent befriended Helen during *Titanic's* fatal voyage.

“Sealed Orders” is an engaging, if not entirely accurate, chronicle of *Titanic*'s fatal voyage. But its emotion is genuine and, after more than 93 years, it's still one of the most gripping survivor stories. Touching on more than the journey's nightmare end, Helen Churchill Candee provides a compelling, haunting glimpse of the beauty and power of a great ship, the elegance and fellowship of Edwardian travel, and the thrill of romance at sea.

Sealed Orders

By HELEN CHURCHILL CANDEE

Originally published in *Collier's Weekly*, 4 May 1912

“Those who love them call them gone but they live with a virility immortal.”

Mrs. Candee was a passenger on the Titanic, returning to America after a winter of literary work abroad. She has written impersonally a narrative so vivid that the imagination cannot escape from it.

When all the lands were thrilling with the blossoming month of shower and sun, three widely differing craft crept out upon the sea.

One sailed from the New World's city of towers, plowing east. Another coquetted with three near ports of Europe and then sailed west. The third slipped down unnoticed from the glacial north.

The first was a little ship, and modestly glided down the bay and took her place on the ocean highway.

But across, on the other side of the world, the triumph of shipbuilding was starting her maiden trip — challenging the sea, men said. But a challenge is given to those who have rivals. The mammoth had none. She was the largest ship man had ever made; in her construction and in her finish, from keel to topmast, she was the ultimate note of talent and skill and invention. Triumphant was the word that best told her imperial progress.

And the third, a sinister craft, set out from the north with an insolent indifference that transcended even the magnificence of the greatest ship afloat.

And to all three of these craft the power that is greater than man gave sealed orders. All three, though they knew it not, were bound for the same unmarkable spot on the shifting surface of the deep.

The titan's departure was the one men noticed, for power and riches cannot be obscure.

Three days out the ship knew she was Queen of the Seas. Not only was she the largest, the most beautiful, but she was hour by hour discovering herself a possible fleetest. And that way came destruction.

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There had been delays in detaching from the shore; at one port a too close touch with another ship, a stop of hours at another for heavy bags of mail. But when free of the land, at last on the high sea, day followed day with the weather in which ships make time. When the run went on the board it astonished, and there was a light laugh of pleasure from smoking room, deck and lounge. Each man felt it a credit to himself. The ship was to make a record trial run.

The oldest captain of the fleet had the crowning honor of his sea life in his assignment, and the head man of the line was on board. From stokehole to bridge the men had been picked with care from among their fellows on lesser boats, that the crew might be worthy of their trust.

It almost seemed that passengers had been picked, too. The richest man was there, and he who by striving had nearly reached him. About the decks strolled the artist of renown and the great writer, the man of theatrical success, the giant in the world of trade, the aid of a nation's president, the prettiest woman, the woman who represented social prominence, the indispensable American girl, presidents of railways, aristocrats of Europe — all these to add to the glory of the first sea-crossing of the biggest ship.

Two days to try her wings, to prove herself, and she was off for the saving of time. And the passenger for whom the keel had been laid and the magic wrought looked over the side at the flying water and laughed as a child.

A blond woman on the steerage deck stands like a viking's daughter, facing the wind. Her hair is golden bright in the sun, her long lines of grace show bold where the wind passes hard their draping. Around her is her little brood, shouting and leaping in the wild free air. All have their faces set on the new Land of Possibility, whither the ship is taking them smooth and fast, day to night. Over the child asleep in her arms, the woman's wide eyes are directed forward with the look of the emigrant, the look of courage, which has conquered fate since the days of Columbus and the colonies.

“Let us wander over the ship and see it all,” said she of the cabin de luxe to him of the bachelor's cabin. So they mounted the hurricane deck and gazed across to the other world of the second class and wondered at its luxury, and further across to the waves and wondered at their clemency.

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A door along the starboard side was open, there were clicking sounds within and a cheery English voice sang out.

“Come in, come right in, and try your strength,” cried the exhibitor of this particular booth in Donnybrook Fair. “Have a race with me on the wheel, sir, while the lady takes a trot in the saddle. Or, here is a camel for you, sir — good for the liver.”

His own could not have needed it, so rubicund and clean of tint was he, this powerful five-feet-five of white flannels. He bounded about the place, pulling weights with a smooth finish, slipping into a sliding seat and begging him of the Two to take the other boat and beat him with a Cambridge stroke. He was up again like a cat and gave a hard hand to the lady's foot to mount her into the saddle and to turn on the appliance for the trot.

And so they played an hour with the toys in this wonderful retreat, never thinking of the sweet waters that lay so far away.

“I expect you'll be having a plunge in the pool after all this exercise, sir,” said the white flannels. “I'll see you in the morning for another go with the wheel and the oars.”

It was getting cold, biting cold, the cold that makes you glad to be alive, with air and water clear and clean as young blue eyes. The acres of decks were free of loungers, even those whose chairs were set well behind the plate-glass weather screen. It was a time for activity, and a scattered parade was on.

“You are flirting with the prettiest girl,” she accused, laughing.

“Man is omnivorous,” he admitted, laughing back. “One of the women I most admire is this one,” and he signified an elderly figure, soberly dressed, walking arm in arm with her husband. With no parleying you knew they were people who had gained and accepted the sweets of success without intoxication. Sobriety and modesty were theirs; strength and calm showed in their faces.

“They, too, have been using one of the ship's appliances,” explained he of the Two. “They have just finished a Marconi chat with their son, whose east-bound ship is talking to ours. I see the glow on their faces — the same parental glow of the woman on the steerage deck. And there it is again — that handsome woman over there. See, it is for her son who is beside her with the admirable young wife. I have noticed them all the way over.”

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Then they went inside to escape the cold sparkling in the water and snapping in the air. And snugly in a green bay of the saloon, a bay of velvet and wood in furniture shapes, they settled down before a glowing grate as one settles down before the home fire after a frosty afternoon ride over the fields. And servants brought tea and toast, and a general feeling of well-being brought content. The old couple came in and settled nearby; the lady with the fine son drifted in and showed her pride to the world, her loving care for him. The quiet hour was on, the hour when the sun grows sleepy.

At dinner, two hours later, the scene might have been in London, or New York, with the men in evening jackets, the women shining in pale satins and clinging gauze. The prettiest girl even wore a glittering frock of dancing length, with silver fringe around her dainty white satin feet.

And after dinner there was coffee served to all at little tables around the great general lounging place, for here the orchestra played.

Some said it was poor on its Wagner work, others said the violin was weak. But that was for conversation's sake, for nothing on board was more popular than the orchestra. You could see that by the way everyone refused to leave it. And everyone asked of it some favorite hit. The prettiest girl asked for dance music, and clicked her satin heels and swayed her adolescent arms to the rhythm.

He of the Two who had walked the deck asked for Dvorak, while she asked for Puccini, and both got their liking, for the orchestra was adroit and willing.

At eleven, folk drifted off to their big cabins, with happy “see-you-in-the-mornings,” until a group formed itself alone, and the only sounds the musicians made were those of instruments being shut in their velvet beds.

The Two had all their friends about them. It was early yet. There was the restaurant above, a more cozy place for a little crowd — and things to drink were there on the end of a word of order. So they all strayed easily up the regal stairway — refusing this time the lift — and arrived at the littlest place that one might eat, and took a table large enough for the six. The only other table was made gay by the party of a president's aid.

“But how cold it is, how arctic!” and she of the Two drew close her scarf.

“Something hot, then,” said he to the waiter and the steam savored of Scotch and lemons.

How gay they were, these six. The talkative man told stories, the sensitive man glowed and laughed, the two modest Irishmen forgot to be suppressed, the facile Norseman cracked American jokes, the cosmopolitan Englishman expanded, and the lady felt divinely flattered to be in such company.

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Half-past eleven came. Even the last parties were breaking up, and only a handful of men strayed ladyless into the smoking room and fell to cards or reminiscence. Except for those and the night watch, the ship's company had settled in for another night of repose.

Silence and emptiness were all the illumination shone in the public rooms and corridors of the great vessel. And in this soft silence the titan was flying like an arrow on the trackless sea, whither sealed orders were sending her.

But she was not the first to arrive at the tryst.

Down from the north that other sinister craft had slipped into her destined place. No wireless equipment, no port or starboard lights, no lines of cabins showing bright, no compass, no captain. But the power that is greater than man has no need of man's methods.

The craft stretched its low, uneven length over miles of smoothest sea, shooting up peaks of dazzling white in lieu of sails, and her escort was the sleek, black seal and the wide-winged gull.

With implacable patience the white craft awaited the coming of the greatest ship on earth, a virgin running to the unknown bridal across a starlit sea. It was nearly midnight when she shuddered with horror in the embrace of the northern ice. Twice, from bow to stern, she shook with mighty endeavor to crush beneath her the assailant. And it seemed she had succeeded.

A great calm at once fell upon the ship, such a calm as falls in port, and solitude reigned along the wide halls. A sleepy head or two were thrust from cabin doors, but seeing nothing went back to bed. Stewards were reassuring, gay and idle. In the smoking room men went on bidding for the trump.

But the Two went for a walk in the keen cold air of the decks, "because I was startled," so she apologized.

They mounted the hurricane deck again and stood by the closed door of the gymnast's chamber. They looked up at the violently roaring steam escaping by the mammoth funnels.

"It's all right," he said. "That is always a precaution when machinery stops."

"But why are not the other engines doing the same?"

He could not answer; he did not know the bottom had been torn from the ship beneath him. They walked aft and looked down where the mother and children of the steerage had been playing, and where the prosperous second class passengers had reveled in their comforts — solitude, desertion, not a human being in sight.

"There is a list to starboard," said she.

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He was grimly silent. They went forward to make sure. There the list was worse — the deck leaned as a man leans with a sword in his side. On the deck below they found the same desertion as everywhere, the deck where all the chairs were spread, where folk displayed themselves and criticized others. The Two now seemed all the people in the world, and because of the cold, and because each was facing sorrow back home, they walked about for warmth of body and cracked jokes for warmth of heart.

"If I had had a wireless — if I knew that my child was no longer living..." she left him to imagine

the rest.

"I don't mind going either," he said, grim for a moment.

"Nevertheless," she laughed. "I'd fight death to the last if it came. I'd be Mrs. Lecks and put on black stockings to scare sharks. Why are we so calm?"

"We are Anglo-Saxons," said he.

The cold drove them into the big green velvet room with its glowing grate, empty in its blaze of light.

A young man — he of the adoring mother and adorable wife — sprang across the wide floor, holding cuplike hands together as he approached the Two.

"Ice!" he laughed. "Have some iceberg. Take a piece! That's what happened — we struck an iceberg. This is what was left on deck." And he flew away.

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She took the bit, wondering in awe, until he of the Two dashed it from her and chafed her cold, small hand until it glowed again. Turning the chafing into a caress, he never let her hand go. And in that minute they looked into each other's faces, acknowledged the presence of death and accepted it. But neither spoke a word.

After that, people began to come about, some dressed, some not, some alarmed, all quiet and curious to learn the cause of the disturbance. They took the seats about the companionway and talked low.

Women still in sweeping dinner gowns drew wraps about them as the deck door opened. People talked in conventional groups, and all waited, knowing not for what they delayed.

The Two went again outside. The list had terribly increased as they viewed it from the deserted deck.

"Listen!" said she, holding his arm. "That noise over our heads — it is the sound of lifeboats being put out?"

His answer was to force her to the scene above. Scarce a passenger, but the port side filled with a growing crowd of wiry men, black alike in face and dress, crowding in orderly fashion about the strong, quiet figure of the captain.

The firemen had been ordered up from the engine room and that black crew huddled together, awaiting the order to man the lifeboats, the order that would put life again into their hands, for they knew, these hard-faced toilers, that only little boats could save from death at sea. She smiled on them as she walked through the iron crew, and they looked, startled at the smile, thinking it lack of wit, not excess of courage.

But he was uneasy and again took her downstairs and within, in search of less grim scenes.

Different, but was it less grim? Up the sweep of the regal staircase was advancing a solid procession of all the ship's passengers, wordless, orderly, quiet and only their dress told of tragedy. On every man and woman's body was tied that sinister emblem, the life preserver, as each one walked to await the coming horrors. It was a fancy-dress ball in Dante's Hell.

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Another glance between the Two. He caught her by the arm and forced her to a cabin, threw over her shoulders the white and bulky pack, saw that she was warmly wrapped, seized a rug, and said, briefly, "Come."

They passed those who huddled within the ship and mounted again to the topmost deck. A line of boats swung on davits at deck level; the black cloud of firemen, faces set, still waited for the command to jump in. The order came on clear, cold air: "Down below, men. Everyone of you, down below!"

And without a sound they willingly turned from life and went to death, no protest, no murmur, no resistance, a band of unknown heroes.

Then it was that the captain ordered: "Put the women in the boats. No men are to go." He spoke hard words in a quiet voice, that none might disobey.

Now for tragedy; all the horrors of separation had begun:

A little lady made her appeal: "See, captain, my arm is broken. My husband must go with me or I am helpless."

"No men allowed in the boats, madam," and the captain turned away.

Another tried: "I am not young, and need my son; may he not come?"

"Only women."

And the young man in gay courage gave his mother and wife to the care of the swinging boat.

Others got in; the captain, who knew he was living his final hour, stopped a number, augmented it, then ordered the little craft lowered. In the boat, twenty-five silent women descended nearly a hundred feet. They were filled with hope, sure that those on board were better off than they, sure that all would be reunited either on the big ship they were leaving, or on the other vessel whose far white light showed just over the port quarter.

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The Marconi man was hard at work; the second biggest ship was in near waters, and hope was high.

Terrible was the artillery of the rockets. The great ship seemed to shriek in despair. Before that was a dignity of self-confidence, but in that wild cry to heaven went up all the horror of death.

Then it was that the women in the lifeboats agonized over what love had coerced them into doing. What was life but love, and what was life without loved ones? The weight of the discovery can never be told. Women of courage had been tricked by noble heroes into saving their own lives. It was an easy ruse — "get into the boats; obey because it helps me; we will soon be together again; do it for my sake, or the children's." By these sophistries of love were the women put into the boats at a time and in a place where theirs seemed the harder part to do.

But when each boat reached the water, the women knew. They saw the salt flow sloping over the lighted ports of the third deck and knew the vessel was already sunken forty feet into oblivion.



Helen fell and broke her ankle as she boarded lifeboat 6 but still managed to help row away from the sinking ship.

“Keep all the boats together and pull away from the vessel,” the captain had said in a strong, calm voice. Why pull away? Because presently the great palace of light would be following the lead of her diving bow, and in the final plunge would draw everything after her.

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On the ship the bravely competent still loaded boats with protesting women and wailing children.

“Take her from me, take her!” cried the men from whom wives refused to part, and it was done.

In a corner against the cabin stood the aged couple, calmly resolute. “Come into this boat,” the rescuers said to her. “I stay with my husband,” she said simply. It was not the frantic protest of the younger women, but the firm will of the seasoned soul. And in death these two were not divided.

What can one whose profession is to amuse do in a time of tragedy? They, too, have a part in the great play of courage. Over the crowds, quiet, inactive, anguished, there flowed a flood of music, such music as was never before heard — a gay march, a two-step, light operatic airs, all freighted with a burden of love, that love which lays down its life for a friend. The ship's orchestra was sending out courage from man to man in its peculiar expression, cheering others while itself faced death.

Men of courage and resource who had been loading and lowering boats from the very first came at last to a stop. The last boat was ready for the launching. Two who had held together in the work went a deck below to see if any stray women were there unrescued. All was brilliant desolation. The lights were beginning to burn low. Water — soft, noiseless water — was creeping up the slanting deck so fast that in another minute they would have been imprisoned under the deck's roof. They leaped to the railing and mounted it.

At that moment the last boat floated before them, three yards away, with vacant room in the bow. Surely they had the right! They looked in each other's faces to ask the question, and each nodded to the other, “yes.” They leaped the space and caught the side of the boat, the last to leave the ship by boat, and almost the only rescuers who were saved.

The hundreds that were left drew closer. The beaten bow was hidden underwater, the only uncovered stretch of deck sloped high toward the stern, and on this diminished point huddled a close pack who awaited death with the transcendent courage and order and quiet that had been theirs for the horrible two hours.

And over them trembled the last strains of the orchestra's message: “Autumn” first, then “Nearer, my God, to Thee.”

Down on the sea, the little lifeboats were following the captain's orders to pull away from the ship in water as calm, as full of stars, as the pool in a Moorish garden. All awaited the end, transfixed. Window after window of the ship became dark as the water covered it in slow descent; less and less became the stern where the hushed crowd waited.

At last, the end of the world. A smooth, slow chute. Life went out on the big ship.

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The death call of 1500 units of divine selflessness spread its volume over the waters as a single cry to God. There was no shriek nor wail nor frantic shout. Instead a heavy moan as of one being, from whom final agony forces a single sound.

And with this human protest against stifling arctic waters was a muffled sound from within, the groan of the dying ship, as if she, too, were sensate and joined her agony with man's.

The mass in the dark waters was thrown hither and thither, and one or two caught rafts and boats. In the human instinct to preserve life, one man had drawn himself upon a raft.

He was white-haired and bearded, but short and strong, and had much to live for. At last the raft had rescued so many she endangered all, and then began the horrid task of fighting off the swimmers.

Those who looked for the gray beard on the raft saw him no more. Seeing the crush of men, he had seded his place and slipped into the sea.

“Don't get on. You'll swamp us!”

“All right. God keep you all. Good bye.” And the waters closed over him. It was the little gymnast.

After that, silence on the surface of the deep, and awe on the faces of the stricken freight in the scattered lifeboats. Where had been the glowing lights from the luxurious cabins of the mammoth ship was now a soft, impersonal sheen of silver starlight, the implacability of nature.

And how futile were the little boats. Where were they going? Why were they there?

The distant light that some had followed from the first scudded away into the aurora as fast as the first breath of breeze rippled over the glassy waters.

Why live now, to die miserably of cold and starvation and drenching? And always with the horror of that death groan sounding in ears and soul. It was then that those in the boats who had been picked up from the water gave up the spirit. It was then that the mother of the fine son began to call for him in the unmeaning repetition of the mind which has snapped. It was then that the emigrant woman of the many babes sent screams for them ringing to the stars in maniac baby-talk. It was then that the ghostly gulls swung and cried in the icy air.

Three hours before, the Marconi man had been at his post on the ship. Out over the oily sea, out in the clear, crisp air, as far as the twinkling canopy of stars, trembled a soundless cry from magic wires: “Ship is sinking fast!”

Fully 60 miles away a faithful wire had trembled in response.

And thus the third craft that went a-sailing on an April day learned of her sealed orders and their import, and turned flying to the trysting place.

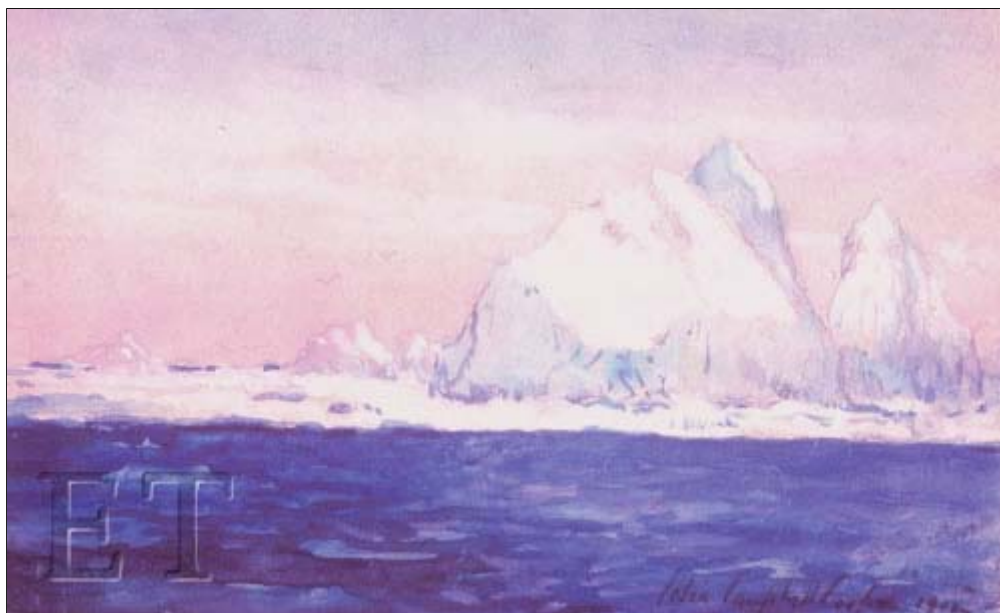
All night she was preparing to help the proud, big ship, happy to serve so great a suppliant. She would be small and shabby beside the greater vessel, but would humbly do her best, and so she pounded the engines and kicked the waters and strained the boilers.

The latitude and longitude given by the cry for succor were attained, yet the keenest glass could find no lights other than the stars. Darkness brooded on the face of the ocean, and terror in the faces of the relief.

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Dawn showed the vast reaches of the sea, empty of big craft. But floating near, a swaying tangle of deck chairs and cushions, and a pale white babe rocked in the cradle of that fashioning. The sun lingered on coming on such a scene.

The rescue ship lay still and watched it. The aurora in the north was paled by steaks that looked like rosy chiffon scarfs, waving over the sun's east. Close down in the warm glow perched an impertinent crescent moon.



Colin Campbell Cooper's watercolor of the icebergs surrounding the rescue ship Carpathia the morning after Titanic's sinking.

Toward the sun rose sinister points of ice, dark against the light. Struck by the morning rays were these wondrous glistening sails of frozen white and pearly pink — ice mountains glorified into celestial beauty. And as far as the eye could see, the limitless level of the ice pack, purer and whiter than man's imagining.

The woman crying for her babes because they were not, the moan of the mother calling her son — these were almost the only sounds from the rowboats that showed like shells on the water, a limping, chilled, sorrowing fleet to whom the rescue ship brought salvation.

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But a few hours more and the modest ship of gentle aim was turning back to port, heavy with the hundreds saved, its flag at half-mast. The burden of sorrow in the widows' hearts was to be read in the dark shadows of their eyes, the wail of the mothers was heard in the closed chamber of the sick.



The rescue ship plucked Helen and 711 other survivors from the sea. Watercolor by Colin Campbell Cooper.

For every life on board, three braver ones had surrendered theirs in God-like selflessness.

The icepacks lay for miles, dazzling in the sun, peaks rising proudly here and there. Seals, black and shiny, showed in the waters, gulls flew and cried — active white against silent white.

Superb, thrilling, dominant, the ice held the region with nature's strength. The power greater than man's had prevailed, the crushing force against which there is no defense, no pity, no sparing. It was the power that is of God, which is the divinity of noble men.

Those who love them call them gone, but they live with a virility immortal. The courage of 1500 souls who quietly gave their lives for others floods an entire world and makes us humbly eager to give tribute by living nobler lives.

And as long as man lives the uplifting tale will be told, showing the divinity which is man's and his kinship to God.

Courtesy of Randy Bryan Bigham

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