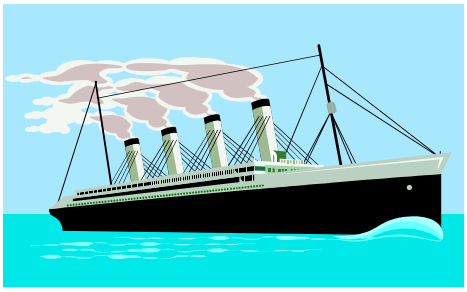
From *The Titanic*

by Richard Wormser



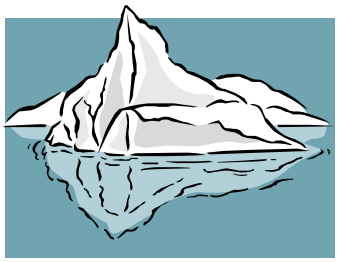
Four crew members relaxing in a first-class lounge heard a grinding noise from deep inside the ship. It sounded, one said, as if "a propeller had fallen off." Many first-class passengers felt a shock. To Marguerite Frolicher, a young Swiss woman, it seemed, "as if the ship were landing." Lady Duff Gordon, a dress designer married to a British nobleman, commented that it was as if "someone had run a giant finger along the side of the ship."

On the ship's lower decks, the noise was even louder. Some people in second class were awakened by the jolt. Major Arthur Godfrey Peuchen, a Canadian, thought "a heavy wave" had struck the ship. Mrs. Walter Stephenson, who had lived through the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, thought the shock felt like an earthquake tremor.

Deep within the ship, the men tending the boilers that powered the *Titanic* knew exactly had happened. In one of the boiler rooms, a tremendous rumbling, scraping sound was heard, followed by a terrifying roar as tons of sea water came crashing into the ship. The whole left side of the ship seemed to collapse suddenly. The men barely escaped with their lives.

In the third-class area, Carl Bohme, a Finnish immigrant, got out of bed to see what was going on and found himself up to his ankles in water. In the mailroom, the water was already covering the knees of the postal workers, who were frantically trying to keep the mail from getting wet.

Most passengers still didn't realize how serious things were. Some third-class passengers had discovered that their deck was covered with ice that had fallen from the iceberg. Some began to have a snowball fight. Soon passengers from every class were picking up pieces of ice. Some even used the ice to cool their drinks. Whatever the problem, they seemed confident that it would seen be solved.



A few passengers, however, were well aware that something was terribly wrong. Lawrence Beasley, a schoolteacher traveling in

second class, had started back to his cabin when he noticed that somehow his feet weren't falling in the right place. The stairs were level, but he felt slightly off balance. It was as if the steps were suddenly tilting forward towards the bow, the front part of the ship. In fact, they were.

Below the decks was Thomas Andrews, the chief engineer who had supervised the design of the *Titanic*. He was on board to see how the ship would perform on her maiden voyage and whether any adjustments needed to be made. No one knew the *Titanic* better than Andrews. No man, not even Captain Smith, commanded more respect from the crew. Now the ship's officers were anxiously waiting for him to tell them what was happening.

Andrews studied the reports of the damage and then gave Capitan Smith the bad news: The rock-hard base of the iceberg had scraped the Titanic's hull below the waterline, gashing some holes in her side and loosening the steel plates that held her together. Water was rushing into the front of the ship. Andrews explained there were 16 water-tight compartments on the ship from bow to stern, the back end of the ship. The ship could float if the first four were filled. But if the fifth compartment, or bulkhead, was filled, the bow would begin to sink so low that water would spill over that bulkhead into the sixth compartment. Because the *Titanic's* bulkheads were not high enough to prevent this from happening, the spillover would continue from compartment to compartment until the whole ship filled with water and sank.

The *Titanic* was doomed.

"How long have we got?" the captain asked.

"About two hours," Andrews replied.

Smith and Andrews both knew that there were 2,207 passengers and crew on board, but room for only about 1,178 people in the lifeboats. Unless a rescue ship arrived with two hours, more than 1,000 people would drown. There was no time to waste.