

BOOK CLUB KIT

A BRILLIANT NIGHT OF STARS AND ICE

REBECCA CONNOLLY

BASED ON THE REMARKABLE TRUE STORY.

A sea captain and his crew abandon their transatlantic voyage and race into a deadly field of ice in an attempt to save the people on board the Titanic before it's too late.

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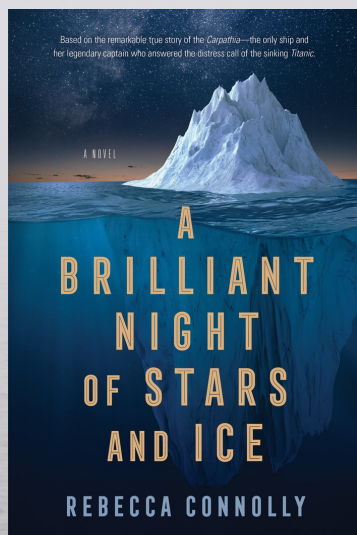
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A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

It is an unusual thing for a story of courage, faith, and heroism to be found by accident in something as popular and well-known as the Titanic disaster, but that is exactly how I stumbled upon the pieces of history that prompted the writing of this book. In the summer of 2015, I took a trip with one of my best friends and her parents around the British Isles. I had been there before, and so had she, but never together. We went so many places, saw so many beautiful things, and loved indulging in the history and nature in each location. Almost on a whim, while we were in Belfast, Northern Ireland, we decided to spend some time in the Titanic museum there. What basic knowledge and insight I had going in was quickly replaced by an almost hallowed appreciation for the crafting of the ship, the majesty of its furnishings and appearance, and the horrifying disaster that we so lightly mention in passing. The most significant part of the exhibit, for me, was the communication room. The walls were papered with images of messages sent out by Titanic as well as from other ships she was in communication with, and one telegram caught my attention specifically—the last one of the collection.

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*A Brilliant
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haunting yet
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rush to the
rescue.

—Jen Geigle Johnson,
author of *A Foreign Crown*

It read simply “CQ—” and nothing more.

I stared at that telegram, the significance of the unfinished message making my heart sink. That was it; no one heard from the ship again. That was the moment that hope was gone for those that were involved. How often is an exact moment like that captured for eternity? Around the next corner was a display about the rescue of the survivors, and there I learned two names that captured my interest: Carpathia and Captain Arthur Rostron.

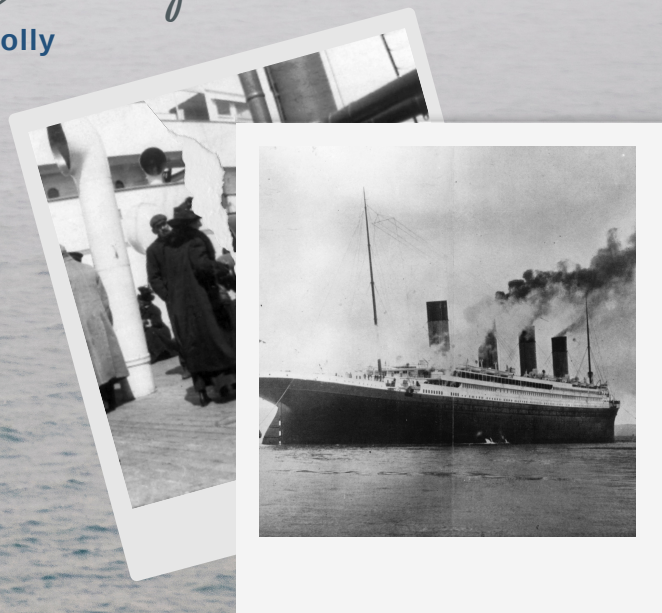
I had never heard of either name and I made a note to look both up when I got home, more to continue my education on the disaster itself than anything else. I had no idea that there was a miraculous story involved in the actual rescue and the hours leading up to it. All of that had been lost in the wake of the disaster itself, and that was astounding to me.

How could such a powerful story of providence, of sacrifice, and of heroism be forgotten? I knew then that I needed to tell the story, to honor those who had been lost, and to remind as many as I could of the beauty that exists in simple acts of doing good.

Thank you so much for helping me to make that happen.

Rebecca Connolly

Rebecca Connolly



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.

Arthur Rostron was sailing on a twelve-year-old ship that did not have finery, the latest technology, or the attention that Titanic did, but was content with that. **Has there been a time in your life when you seemed to be lacking what others had? How did you feel?**

2.

Kate Connolly and her friends were thrilled to be opening a new chapter in their lives that was beginning with this journey on Titanic to America. **Do you think starting over would be exciting or terrifying, or both? In what ways?**

3.

The Titanic passengers in steerage had little to no direction as to how to properly evacuate the ship and get to lifeboats, leading to a staggering loss of life. If not for Martin Gallagher, Kate and her friends might have been among them. Similarly, Harold Cottam was readying for bed when he happened to catch the messages for Titanic, which led to him reaching out to Jack Phillips and receiving the message of distress. **Do you believe some people are placed in the right situation at the right time for a reason? Is it all a coincidence?**

4.

When Arthur receives the news of the Titanic being in trouble, he does not hesitate to act and immediately changes course to go to them. **Have you ever experienced a moment where your course was crystal clear and there was no hesitation? What can get in the way of that?**

5.

Kate and her friends witnessed some heartbreaking separations of family, of friends, and of sweethearts during their loading into the lifeboat and casting off from Titanic. **What effect would witnessing such separations have on the morale of others? Would it make being saved harder for those experiencing it?**

6.

The list of requirements Arthur gave to his officers and, by extension, the crew of the Carpathia, was both thorough and forward thinking. **How do you think this helped the situation they were going to be in?**

7.

The icebergs that Arthur and his ship encounter on their way to the Titanic and must navigate around made the voyage that much harder and more dangerous for them in their attempts to rescue survivors. **Why do hard events seem to have ever more difficult parts while we try to cope with them?**

8.

Noël, Countess of Rothes, spent the entire return journey to New York serving the survivors of Titanic, regardless of station or condition, despite being a survivor of the tragedy herself. **Do you know someone who thinks of others before themselves, even in the middle of hardships? What makes them remarkable to you?**

9.

Arthur asks for a service of thanksgiving and memorial to take place on the Carpathia once they begin to steam away from the wreckage, and asks for the four bodies to be buried according to the rites of their respective faith, despite prejudices of the time. **When have you seen an example of respecting differences in belief and tradition, and what can we learn from this?**

10.

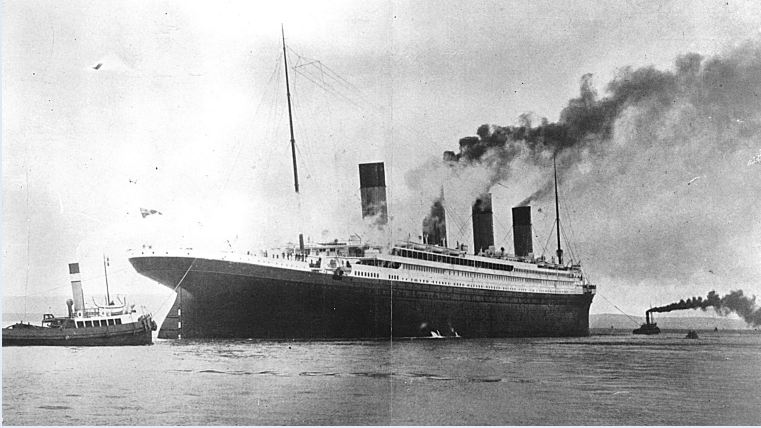
After hours on the water in the freezing cold and being surrounded by more icebergs, hearing the cries of people in the water slowly die off, and having no promise of rescue. **How would seeing a ship on the horizon impact the survivors? What might they have thought?**

“

I've found a new hero in a man who never hesitated in doing the right thing.”

—HEATHER B. MOORE, author of *The Paper Daughters of Chinatown*

BEHIND THE SCENES RESEARCH



The luxury White Star 'Titanic', 1912

Onboard the Carpathia: Down in the boiler room, the “black gang” was infused with energy. Extra hands were shoveling like they’ve never shoveled coal before. They were systematically shutting off steam to the rest of the ship, ducting it to the engines. Trimmers moved wheelbarrows back and forth, determined to make sure that the stokers would never lack coal.

While Racing to Save Titanic: Mrs. Ogden shakes her husband awake, disturbed by the lack of heat in her cabin and the vibration of the ship. They are experienced travelers, and she knew that the liner was going as hard as she could. Sounds disturbed them, and it was unusual. Opened cabin door, peered down corridor, caught sight of stewards and stewardesses carrying blankets and mattresses.

Radio After the Rescue: Harold Cottam was inundated with requests and messages once they were in range of other ships and land stations. He was exhausted by this point. He had not slept or had food in 21 hours. Some of his messages were:

“Will send names immediately we can, you can understand we are working under considerable difficulty. Everything possible is being done for the comfort of survivors. Please maintain stand by.”

“I cannot do everything at once. Patience, please. Please excuse sending, but am, half asleep.”

“Captain, chief, first and sixth officers and all engineers gone. Also doctor, all pursers, one Marconi operator and chief steward gone. We have second, third, fourth, and fifth officers and one Marconi operator on board.” (followed by the survivors list.)

BEHIND THE SCENES

In the News: Initial reports across newspapers were varied and usually incorrect. The Times managing editor (Carr Van Anda) in NYC gets a bulletin from Cape Race about Titanic. Calls White Star NY office, then Time's correspondents in Montreal and Halifax.

There were changes to the headlines of early edition Times. "New liner Titanic hits an iceberg; sinking by the bow at midnight; women put off in lifeboats; last wireless at 12:27 AM blurred."

White Star offices were besieged with calls, but continued to claim, "Titanic is unsinkable!"

The Evening Sun claimed, "All saved from titanic after collision"

In the evening of April 15, the real news comes, and the White Star Offices are stunned. Mr. Phillip Franklin slowly comes out of the office to the reporters.

"Gentlemen, I regret to say that the Titanic sank at 2:20 this morning. We very much fear there has been a great loss of life. It would be possible to replace the ship, but never the human lives."

False estimates: the New York Times said 1250 dead, the New York American said as many as 1800 dead



Titanic survivors aboard rescue ship CARPATHIA: unidentified group on deck, 1912.

Family on both ships: The Marshalls (Charles H. Marshall) were a couple on the Carpathia. Two of their nieces were on Titanic. Sunday evening, they sent a message to the aunt and uncle, just a cheery greeting about how they enjoyed the ship and the crossing. The Marshalls retired to their state cabin and slept through entire racing off and rescue. The next morning, a steward comes to cabin. "What is it?" "Your nieces wish to see you, sir." He opened the door wider and looked upon the girls, who had been through so much. They immediately embraced and stayed together in the cabin until they reached New York.

BEHIND THE SCENES

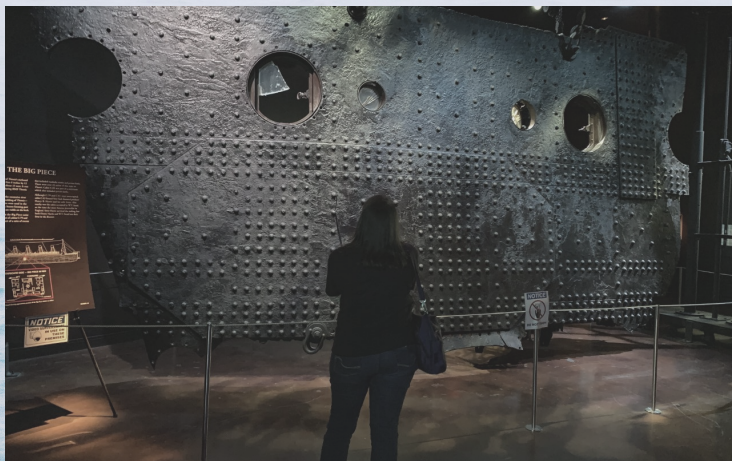
On Lifeboat 13: Alexander Littlejohn, part of the Titanic victualling crew, gave an interview to The Daily Telegraph (10 May 1912) about his experience in Lifeboat 13: “I got about 35 women and children into Boat 13. We shouted for more women but there were none forthcoming. We had a few first-class male passengers in. An officer ordered two of us to get in and help row the boat, and I happened to be one of the fortunate ones... We could see the Titanic sinking by the head. Her forward ‘E’ deck ports were under the water and we could see the lights gradually go out on the ‘E’ deck as she settled down. All her other lights were burning brilliantly, and she looked a blaze of light from stem to stern. We watched her like this for some time, and then suddenly she gave a plunge forward and all the lights went out. Her stern went right up in the air; there were two or three explosions and it seemed to me the stern part came down again and righted itself. Immediately after there were terrible cries for help. They were awful and heart-breaking.”



The front of the Titanic museum in Belfast (Belfast, United Kingdom). Photo by Rebecca Connolly.



Where Titanic and Olympic were built (Belfast, United Kingdom). Photo by Rebecca Connolly



Author Rebecca Connolly in front of an actual piece of the Titanic (at the "Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition" in Las Vegas, NV, 2021). Photo by Jen Geigle Johnson.



The view out at the water when standing where Titanic was built (Belfast, United Kingdom). Photo by Rebecca Connolly

ADVANCE PRAISE

"Reading *A Brilliant Night of Stars and Ice* made me realize that the full story of the tragedy of the unsinkable *Titanic* hasn't been shared yet. Captain Rostron's decisive and heroic actions as he prepared his crew for what they were about to encounter was inspirational and heartrending. I've found a new hero in a man who never hesitated in doing the right thing."

—HEATHER B. MOORE

author of *The Paper Daughters of Chinatown*

...—

"*A Brilliant Night of Stars and Ice* is a haunting yet hopeful story of one man's rush to the rescue."

—JEN GEIGLE JOHNSON

author of *A Foreign Crown*



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About the Author

REBECCA CONNOLLY



Rebecca Connolly is the author of more than two dozen novels. She calls herself a Midwest girl, having lived in Ohio and Indiana. She's always been a bookworm, and her grandma would send her books almost every month so she would never run out. Book Fairs were her carnival, and libraries are her happy place. She received a master's degree from West Virginia University.

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