

2012
TITANIC
One Hundred Years

A Head-On Collision

A. Bark

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AN ADAPTATION

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TITANIC
HONDERD JAAR
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PROLOGUE

On April 14, 2012, it will be exactly one hundred years since the “Unsinkable” Titanic sank to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean on her maiden voyage. As time goes by, this disastrous event will keep appealing to the imagination of a growing number of people. It will continue to inspire writers and moviemakers alike. Since we, the authors of “Titanic 100 Years”, have been subject to this mysterious phenomenon ourselves, we have decided to launch yet another film about this legendary Ocean Liner. However, it will be a variation on an existing theme so to speak. It will, beyond any doubt, surprise the whole world to learn what could have and what should have happened on that gruelling night of April 14. In “Titanic 100 Years”, we have elaborated on this basic idea, thus providing the script- writers with the necessary material for their scenario while purposely giving them plenty of leeway for their personal interpretation.

EVERYBODY KNOWS WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO THE TITANIC IN 1912:

The First Officer on duty, William McMaster Murdoch, just before his evasive action, had closed, from the bridge, the electrically controlled watertight doors that separated the sixteen compartments into which the ship was divided. Unfortunately, a spur of ice jutting from the iceberg had cut six thin slits through the one-inch-thick steel plates, twenty feet below the waterline. The sea had rushed into the hull at the rate of almost seven tons per second. Each of the six forward compartments had suffered its own individual damage. Since that was two more than the crucial four, the ship couldn't possibly stay afloat. As a result, disaster was inevitable.

Initially, “Titanic 100 Years” gives you nothing but a factual description of the voyage as it proceeded in reality. Seconds before the fatal moment however, fiction begins. In our new film, Murdoch DOES NOT TRY TO AVOID THE LOOMING ICEBERG; HE OPTS FOR A HEAD-ON COLLISION INSTEAD, because he sights the pinnacled black mass too late. The decision to make this manoeuvre is of course the complete opposite of what anyone in his right mind would have normally made; indeed, it SEEMS incredibly absurd. Yet, from hindsight, we know that it was the only correct one under the then existing circumstances. Since only the first two compartments crumple under the impact, THE TITANIC DOES NOT SINK.

Consequently, there is no need to lower the lifeboats. There is no need for passengers and crew members to jump overboard in a desperate attempt to save their lives. This time, Fifth Officer Harold Lowe, William Murdoch's assistant during the First Watch from 8 p.m. till midnight, will not be the hero who returned to the scene of the accident to rescue another four people by pulling them out of the icy waters.

"Titanic 100 Years" deals with the fact that Her Majesty, considered unsinkable in 1912, remains indeed unsinkable. With her bow plunged deep into the water, she completes her maiden voyage and steams safely into New York Harbour. The cost of the necessary repairs to be carried out is considerable, though much less than that of the total loss of this once magnificent ship now lying on the bottom of the North Atlantic, more than 12,000 feet beneath the surface. There are also casualties: the fifteen crew members who, during the crash, happened to be asleep in their bunks in the forward part of the ship. However, 15 is not the same as 1500. Yet, in Court, The Board of Inquiry judges Murdoch's decision to let the Titanic strike the iceberg head-on, utterly inappropriate. The fact that 15 people lost their lives, in particular, weighs heavily. Everyone refuses to come to grips with the fact that it was simply impossible to avoid hitting that monstrous mass of ice in one way or another and that, by letting it scrape the Titanic's under-

side for 300 feet, the result would have been far worse. J. Bruce Ismay, White Star's chairman and managing director, is once again the stubbornly selfish socialite who wants to get his way by setting a speed record in order to cross the Atlantic within a week. Commodore Edward Smith, known as the "Millionaire's Captain", destined to go down with that world famous goliath, in full uniform and medals on his chest, is again too easily becoming Ismay's victim. The young Harold Lowe however, is given a new role; he and Ismay become rival suitors. Lowe, despite his insignificant ranking, ignores Ismay's powerplay and has actually the audacity to court Rose de Bukater, Ismay's fiancée.

Rose gives you the impression that she really was one of the passengers on the Titanic at the time, although she is a mere fictitious character starring in James Cameron's mega-production of the late nineties. The five hundred million dollar blockbuster attracted such a global audience that it actually proved to be a successful venture after all. In that film, Rose plays her part as a first-class passenger while providing us with a

Romeo and Juliet affair with her lover Leonardo di Caprio, a poor migrant travelling in third-class.

In “Titanic 100 Years”, Rose is almost twenty years older. She got divorced in the meantime and is not only well-to-do but, more importantly, still very attractive.

She hasn't lost any of her adventurous behaviour and she remains sufficiently hedonistic to ignore anybody's slanderous gossip or criticism, even that of Ismay who has already pictured her as his future wife. His ego begins to irritate her immensely not long after every single male crew member, with his already lusty eyes, had carried aboard her voluptuous body. The much younger Harold Lowe seems a much better proposition, at least during the short trip. Apart from the people already mentioned, two others featuring in Cameron's creation play an important part as well, namely the die-hard Molly Brown and Ben Guggenheim, the American mining and smelting magnate and father of Peggy, owner of the famous museums. At one stage, Molly was, at a price, the lover of many a cowboy from the Wild West, but she ultimately became a merry, wealthy widow.

Ben is not only accompanied by his mistress Leontine Aumont, but this time also by his wife whose family consists of bankers equally as wealthy as the Guggenheims. All of them are eccentrics and therefore absolutely indispensable characters in a stage setting of the movie “Titanic 100 Years” in which fact and fiction intertwine. Its premiere will be on April 14, 2012.

We are convinced, beyond any doubt, that the “Titanic Fever” will be rekindled once more. Cameron's film will again flood the cinemas and the television channels. With all the material available, he will hopefully become either the director, the producer or both. It would be ideal if he could get the necessary finance by, say 2007. Five years prior to that, the book on which the film will be based must at least be available in Dutch as well as in English, which means well before the premiere. In an endeavour to keep alive the memory of the then World's greatest Ocean Liner, the ultimate publicity-stunt introducing the booklaunch will supplement the act of throwing flowers overboard as it was done before by one of the survivors at the spot where this International Monument went down. In this case, a huge wreath with “Titanic 1912-2012” will be placed on her abyssal grave.

Would there be a single Television Station in the World failing to include this unique moment in its news program? That would be hard to imagine. This stunt will cause “Titanic 100 Years” to be an instant sell-out while becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Dr. Robert D. Ballard - geologist and leader of the American expedition that spotted the Titanic in 1985 - is willing to perform this historical and incredible feat for a mere US\$10,000, which is, of course, only a tiny fraction of the total film budget to be spent. The idea of selecting Ballard to do the job is more befitting than may seem, because he was the one who initially supported artifact recovery, but later radically changed his mind, asserting that the Titanic should be left forever undisturbed as a memorial.

So far, a tremendous amount of material has been taken away from the ship and her surroundings. This time however, the endearing idea will be to take something back to her for a change. Needless to say that a world-wide copyright has been obtained and that all rights have been reserved to protect this original way of advertising the advent of a book because, invariably, there will be human beings who are naturally inclined to think that they themselves were actually the ones coming up with the same idea, seconds after its introduction. Similar to Russian dolls, there are stories within the main story, because the novel is the result of a combination of numerous brainstorming sessions and an ongoing dialogue between two people who manipulate, by remote control as it were, the characters on the Titanic, much like the puppets in a marionette theatre. Since the American psychologist Caitlin Kennedy is not just the future wife but also the sexy girlfriend of high flying Dutchman Dirk Den Helder, it is inevitable that, apart from the main tragedy, you will witness happy endings and happy beginnings full of creative love affairs.

Rotterdam, the Gateway to Europe, April 14, 2002.

I.

After reading Joseph Conrad, Dirk had a clearly defined reason to be attracted to the sea. He was born in 1932, in Rotterdam. Nowadays, after partly being reduced to rubble during World War II, it proudly calls itself “The Gateway to Europe” although the City of Calais has somewhat tarnished that Napoleonic picture after the opening of the tunnel under the Strait of Dover. Interestingly enough, it has turned the United Kingdom into a peninsula again; back to what it was millions of years ago. At the age of eighteen, Dirk studied at one of several Dutch Maritime Institutes. Two years later, he made his first trip as an apprentice officer aboard the “New Amsterdam”, flagship of the Holland-America Line. By way of trademark, all their ships had yellow funnels with green-white-green stripes, the colours of Rotterdam. Dirk’s “maiden voyage” took place exactly forty years after the Titanic’s fatal adversity, an event deeply rooted into his memory bank because, at the Institute, this catastrophe had often been discussed in detail. During that crossing and subsequent ones, he was introduced to a typical kind of broken English used by foreigners; it was a slightly more sophisticated form of communication than the typical seaman’s jargon in which the word “fucking” - derived from Dutch “fokken-breeding” - served as a verbal exclamation mark as well as utter contempt. However, its frequent use was more the result of the subconscious, ingrained habit to sort out the men from the boys. Apart from that, he had also acquired a more literary syntax like that used to describe, in High School English, the sinking of the Titanic for instance. Dirk had memorised that whole story, so he could, at both appropriate and inappropriate moments, cite whole sections of it. During the oral session, the examiner had asked him what he wanted to talk about. Wow! He didn’t need much time to think about that; the Titanic, of course!

With his most polished pronunciation, as if he had studied at Oxford, Dirk had described the ill-fated voyage with theatrical enthusiasm, thus scoring a mark as high as 90%. The examiner had said that he would have got 100%, had he written the account himself. Fair enough. As a matter of course, he had also learnt the art of navigating and how to calculate positions at sea with the help of a chronometer, a sextant and a few specially selected heavenly bodies, including the sun. Electronic addicts would consider it to be a method as old-fashioned as living with candles and kerosene lamps or producing handwritten books, because modern gadgets looking like mobile phones will give locations instantly via satellites.

The mere fact that such a huge and luxurious Ocean Liner took him, not just anywhere but, amazingly enough, to New York as well, was not just another coincidence; it just had to be, but not only that, it was obviously organised by the Creator of the Universe himself, God for short in those days. And if that wasn't enough, guess what happened next? At midnight on April 15, 1952, seven hundred nautical miles from his destination, he actually passed over the spot where the Titanic had gone down on her tragic journey to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. What a coincidence again, or was it? Same date, same time, same position, namely 40° 46' N, 50° 14' W.

The fact that more precise instruments were used later on to find that the exact location of the wreck was a bit further South and East did not in any way affect the belief in a Supreme Involvement. On the contrary, it showed clearly that It was not bounded by the restricting, earthly dimensions used by the nit-picking mortals inhabiting one of his planets. This time, even the setting was somewhat more idyllic. With a full moon overlooking the calm, nocturnal water beneath, Dirk was able to count the brass buttons on the Second Officer's uniform. Together with the two golden stripes and the awfully thin pencil lines of his own, they gently reflected the soft, lunar light. Dirk was not really a God-fearing individual. However, as with all souls at sea, he felt connected to that Organising Source, a title he had once made up. While leaning over the port wing of the bridge, he got the impression that he was standing on top of a ten-storey building while focussing on the twinkling surface at the end of an immense void that seemed to beckon him to jump. Unfortunately the attraction to that friendly looking picture was like the contraption constructed by a trapdoor spider; one must definitely not be tempted to enter it via one's index finger. The treacherous romance emitted by the rays of that yellowish disc on the black, forbidding underground was equally deadly.

The water was, no doubt, as freezing cold as on that fatal night. No way in the world could anyone stay alive in it for more than twenty minutes at the most. Through his mind's eye, Dirk clearly saw again what had happened because he had read numerous books on the subject. The Sea Giant, during her rigor mortis, had pointed her stern, including her gigantic, air-borne propellers, towards the star-lit sky when it had abruptly risen out of the water, causing the forward funnel to topple under the strain. Hundreds of passengers were clinging to the railing, each one an exact copy of "The Cry", the foreboding picture painted by Edvard Munch in 1893.

Finally, from this vertical position, the ship had eased down into the water with a gurgling sound and a man-devouring whirlpool in which they were dragged down into the icy darkness. Almost a thousand others were swimming around forlornly, shrieking, moaning and screaming for help as they slowly froze to death in that icy graveyard. The survival of the fittest according to “Every man for himself and God for us all” had dominated the scene. Some would-be survivors in one of the collapsible boats had actually used oars to strike swimmers who attempted to climb on, thereby jeopardising the lives of the lot. When that crucifying holocaust was over, a deadly silence, this time for real, had mournfully draped itself over the sullen sea like mist over morning meadows. The chill in the enormous Oceanic Esky had taken its toll. By then, this vivid picture also started to rewind the tape with the accompanying startling text.

Only one third of those on board had been given or had unscrupulously obtained a place in the scandalously insufficient number of boats; four collapsible ones and sixteen wooden ones instead of the sixty-four originally planned. Their lifesaving capacity was less than half the number of passengers and crew the ship was designed to carry. It was the duty of Captain Smith to know that. Did he try to cover up that knowledge by electing to forego the compulsory lifeboat drill? Was that one of the reasons why the boats were only partially filled? Although he had ordered the officers in charge to stand by, none of them, except the Fifth, had dared to row back and rescue more people, fearful of being grabbed hold of or capsizing if too many swimmers had managed to clamber on board.

Since the sea had soon turned quite rough, it had taken Harold Lowe twenty minutes before reaching the “Sea of the Dead” where he had plucked four more live ones out of their near zero liquid prison. In his testimony, he had given an eye-witness account of what he had seen.

Hundreds had perished with the cold, their limbs cramped up like crabs. With their bodies floating in lifejackets, they had nevertheless a serene and beautiful look on their faces. His experience had once again proved the fact that, strange as it may seem, it must be a good way to go; if one had to, that is. One of the survivors was Rose de Witt Bukater, a name coined by Cameron in order to avoid possible problems with a real one still alive. Consequently, that name had not yet entered the mind of our young Titanic-freak when he joined the Merchant Navy in 1952. However, it hadn't stopped him from using it again together with other familiar names in order to establish a link between the two films.

II.

Dirk was still daydreaming when the Second Officer, a somewhat grumpy man, yelled at him to look ahead rather than at the passing waves below, and whether or not he knew what the little pencil-drawn asterisk on the chart was for, right on their coursesline.

“That little asterisk shows the place where the Titanic sank, sir.”

“How do you know?”

“I know it by heart, sir; 40° 46' N, 50° 14' W.”

“H'm it would be better if you concentrated more on possible dangers in front of us; after all, we're in that part of the Atlantic where icebergs **do** exist.”

“I can't deny that, sir. By the way, any mention of them?”

“No, but look out nevertheless. As a matter of fact, that's what you will have to do throughout your entire life.”

Dirk was on the verge of demonstrating what he knew about his favourite subject, but he contained himself because he realised that the time was not right to start his learned soliloquy; the Second Officer was not at all in the mood to admire him, he was more likely to belittle him instead. Since the conversation had thus abruptly ended, Dirk looked up at the crow's nest in the foremast. He'd better shut up or otherwise he might wind up in it himself. He certainly didn't look forward to that because he had already discovered what an uncomfortable and God-forsaken place it was. Since he was told to just look around in order to familiarise himself with his new surroundings as soon as he came aboard, he had plucked up the courage to see what that lofty place was like. The term “crow's nest” seemed to fit quite well in the story of “Alice in Wonderland”. However, it had soon dawned on him that the hard reality was neither prose nor poetry. Unlike the bridge, it was open and cold; no windows to hide behind, because article such and such of the Maritime Law states that looking out has to be done with the naked eye. This Law covers all aspects of safety. Article 16 is one of the most important ones, for instance. It gives a definition of what is considered to be a safe speed. It reads, “Every vessel must, in case of mist, haziness, snow, heavy rain or any other situation in which visibility is reduced in a similar way, while considering and heeding the existing circumstances, carefully proceed at a safe speed.” Every officer had to be able to spit it out word for word, even in his sleep. Each time he went back to school to study for the various tickets including his master's, it was a key issue. Dirk muttered the article to himself because he could bet his life that the Second Officer would ask him to repeat it

within the next half hour or so. The man was likely to choose a moment when his apprentice least expected it.

The captain had already tested him on it and so had the First, the Third and the Fourth Officer. So he waited. During nightly watches, when most people were asleep or when there was nothing much to see, officers tended to hassle their pupils. That's why the ensuing question was slightly different. "What is a safe speed, young man?"

Dirk was not at all perturbed because he knew the answer to that one as well. Hadn't he studied the numerous court cases in which the verdict was invariably based on the non-compliance with that definition?

"A safe speed is one that prevents a vessel from colliding with another vessel. A speed that allows for some necessary manoeuvre to be made in order to avoid a collision with another vessel as soon as it comes in sight, as well as for the possibility to stop the vessel within half the visibility.

"H'm, an iceberg is also considered to be a vessel?"

"You're not wrong, sir, said Dirk in an attempt to bridge the gap in ranks."

"H'm, you talk as if we sat at the same desk in school."

"We did, sir, albeit some twenty years later in my case."

Dirk realised that he could never establish a bond between him and his superior who was getting on in years, desirous of becoming a captain himself one day. He tried to continue his repertoire regardless.

"As far as the Titanic is concerned, both icebergs and safe speed were ignored."

"And looking, sneered the Second while peering into the darkness ahead.

That was his way of emphasising the fact that looking out had to be done relentlessly, even when there was nothing to see. To top it off, usually there **was** nothing to see. Unfortunately, it caused eyes to be less alert despite the good intentions of their beholder. Conversation with the Second Officer was always stunted; it consisted mainly of abrupt remarks or short messages. "Go and stand outside, on the port-or starboard wing, I don't care, as long as you use your eyes. By the way, don't hang over the side like an idiot trying to find out how deep the ocean is; that's what an echosounder is for."

"Talking about the Titanic, don't get it into your head to make the passengers aware of the fact that we will pass over the spot where she went down."

"Aye Aye, sir."

Dirk did as he was told; his eyes looked ahead, but his thoughts went back. He was well aware of the shortcomings that had caused the ship to sink. To begin with, the two able-

bodied seamen in the crow's nest had mostly kept their naked eyes below rather than above its edge, because it was freezing cold. Although there was no wind, the ship's speed of 22 knots was enough to make them watery and therefore useless. A crow's nest had become an outdated feature; it belonged to sailing ships like the Batavia or the Endeavour. The wind always came from behind. Since the balloon-like sails pushed into the airstream caused by the ship itself, looking out was not a problem. The two men in the Titanic's crow's nest had been ordered to take turns. Research had shown that they had failed to do so. They had noticed the iceberg too late and too close by. Apart from that, the Titanic's speed was far from being a safe one. Dirk heard again the monotonously croaking voice of his grey-haired and ageing teacher. Old Jerry, they had called him. The windows in his classroom were always hermetically closed because he was adamant in his belief that more people had perished with the cold than as a result of a bad smell. Time and time again would that peculiar voice echo in his head. "A safe speed is a speed whereby a vessel can be stopped within half the distance between that vessel and something that comes in sight." The captain of the Titanic had ignored the circumstances under which the ship was proceeding. His authority had been undermined by the Rasputin-like Ismay. Consequently, he had not heeded the warnings of other ships, he had not slowed down in order to proceed at a safe speed. He went to bed instead while his ship went too fast, much too fast.

III.

The Baltic had cautioned: "Icebergs and large quantities of field ice 41° 51'N, 40° 52'W," a position close to the Titanic's route. Smith had passed the message on to his employer who had then arrogantly put it into his pocket. J. Bruce Ismay had inherited the White Star Line from his father. When it was sold to American millionaire J.P. Morgan, Bruce had become chairman and managing director. As often happens, heirs tend to destroy what their forebears had meticulously built up. Competition with Cunard and Norddeutcher Lloyd had become so fierce that White Star Line decided to build three ships that would, by their enormous size and comfortable elegance, dwarf all other vessels thus far produced.

Their names would be Olympic, Titanic and Gigantic. The Titanic became not only the largest mailship afloat, it was unsinkable, because Ismay had said so. The whole world

had better let that sink in. His ship was unsinkable. It was about time that he dealt such a blow to his rivals. The Titanic was built to offer supreme luxury, not really to set a speed record although between five and six days was a must. Six days was out of the question; that would spoil her image.

The weather had not been unfavourable, but they were receiving many more warnings regarding icebergs and icefields drifting from Greenland towards the New York shipping route.

Ismay rather than Smith had taken control of the ship. He actually wanted the Titanic to run even faster in order to get out of the approaching ice. Captain Smith had acted like a dog with drooping ears. He didn't want to spoil his voyage d'honneur. His career had not been as impeccable as he had made people believe. He had taken for granted the many encounters with field ice during which he hadn't even slowed down. To do this special trip in only five days would certainly enhance his already formidable reputation. Smith heavily relied on spotting icebergs in time so that he could avoid hitting them. That's what all navigators did in those days. Usually they got away with it. By moonlight, it was even easier to see the ice light up in time. When visibility was good, there was no cause for panic either.

"Do you know why the Titanic sank, young man?" interrupted the Second.

"Of course," boasted Dirk. "The lookout didn't do his job and the ship didn't cruise at a safe speed."

"H'm," was the curt reply.

Behind him, Dirk had noticed the grimace on the face of the man at the wheel, so he audaciously thought that he could throw a bit more wood on the fire.

"If we were to see an iceberg right now, we could easily avoid a collision."

"Why is that?"

"Well, eh... it's full moon. Since there is a bit of a breeze, we would see the iceberg as well as the white edges around it. In 1912, it was pitch-black. In that case, icebergs look like silhouettes; you can only see them when they're closer."

The man behind the wheel gave him thumbs up.

"What about a cup of coffee," commented the Second.

Already at school, Dirk had been warned to refrain from trying to be too smart. When he descended the stairs to the bridge on his way to the pantry, he decided to keep his big mouth shut for a while, so when he returned with the coffee for the three of them, that's what he did. The Second said nothing either, but the admonishing sign language of his

outstretched, double striped arm indicated that his apprentice had better go outside. Dirk looked straight ahead while softly mumbling article 16 and intermittently sipping his hot cuppa.

Suddenly, he looked at his watch. “Phew,” 55 minutes after midnight, time to fulfil his hourly duty to heave the log, a device on the railing at the back of the ship. It consisted of a counter and a torpedo-like gadget with a long attached line, formerly used to measure the approximate speed of a ship. He went back and into the chartroom to register the reading in the logbook. They had been cruising at a moderate clip of 19 to 20 knots. Visibility was at least 10 nautical miles, for sure; not much different from that in 1912. If they were to spot an iceberg at that distance right now and if they were able to stop the New Amsterdam within 5 nautical miles, they were going along at a safe speed. Again and again, did his relentlessly questioning mind take him back to the scene that had shocked the world.

First Officer William McMaster Murdoch was horrified after the lookout in the crow’s nest had frantically jerked the warning bell three times.

“Iceberg right ahead,” yelled the man into the mouthpiece of the intercom.

Murdoch himself saw it seconds later; a monstrous colossus, blacker than the darkest night. Although it was a brilliant, starry night, the lookouts had been alarmed by a strange haze ahead of them; that’s why they hadn’t noticed the iceberg as soon as it had appeared on the horizon, especially since the binoculars were missing. The iceberg was now dangerously close by.

“Hard-a-port,” thundered Murdoch while changing the telegraph from full ahead to full astern. However, that simple one-second movement of the hand without previous warning becomes a nightmare down in the engine room; they’re not putting a beetle in reverse. The engines were faced with reversing a 55,000-ton transatlantic leviathan going ahead at 22 knots. For that to happen, the steam generated by the twenty-nine gigantic boilers, each almost 16 feet in diameter, had to be shut off in order to change the direction of the enormous crankshafts. Only then could the steamcocks be reopened to let each of the three propellers, more than 23 feet in diameter, do its job.

This manoeuvre needed quite some time to become effective. The lookouts saw the berg get bigger and bigger; ominously close. They braced themselves for an imminent collision because the bow didn’t seem to veer to the left in order to let the iceberg pass

by on the right. At the very last moment however, it did, so that's why Murdoch hard-a-starboarded to stop the stern from hitting it.

Alas, they went too fast; he had realised it all along. Nevertheless, Captain Edward Smith was the boss who in turn had been under pressure from his superior, J. Bruce Ismay. Murdoch had been aware of this impossible situation for quite some time. He had even tentatively mentioned it to Smith, although his rank wouldn't have allowed him to make a big issue of it. Back in 1912, discipline was still clearly defined. Each officer had a fixed place in the rigid hierarchy which was strictly based on seniority. The difference between the rank and file had to be observed at all times as well.

Instead of smashing into the mass of ice, the ship scraped against it with her starboard side for at least ten seconds. When Captain Smith felt the impact, he rushed to the bridge.

"What have we struck, Mr. Murdoch?" he inquired jovially as if it could only have been a petrified mermaid.

"An iceberg, sir," Murdoch replied.

While he was describing his evasive action to Smith, the latter wasn't really listening, because he would most probably have done the same.

"Close all the watertight doors, just in case," he ordered.

"I already did, sir; judging by the indicator lights, they're all working."

All of a sudden, Dirk's dirty mind, typical of a boy his age, changed unashamedly from the technical to the physical, probably because these warning lights reminded him of the red light district in Amsterdam. Totally oblivious of the thoughts he had only a few seconds earlier, as if struck by a sudden attack of schizophrenia, he concentrated on one imaginary, young, fornicating couple joining in the climax of a maiden voyage.

"Most likely more than just one couple, considering the number of passengers," he thought. Dirk had soon realised that, at any given moment during an Atlantic crossing, romance and love-making are high priority activities; if not in cabins, then at least in some out-of-the-way places like the boat decks or even in the mind itself. At sea, people are reminded again of their pre-amphibious state, primitively engaged in surviving and reproducing.

Even the Second Officer, in one of his more social moods, had taught him some of the typical "below the belt" jargon he had learnt when he was a conscript in the Dutch Navy. Since it was blessed with the extra qualifier "Royal", it was quite discriminative; officers had intercourse for instance, whereas petty officers copulated, and sailors just fucked. Dirk's mental video showed pieces of ice falling on the deck above the heads of the sexually engaged couples. Was it to brutally cool off their carefully generated warmth in order to bring them back to earth again? Neither these intimates nor the crew members not yet asleep were, at that stage, aware of what was happening twenty feet below the water line.

The berg had cut a series of six thin slits into the inch-thick steel plates of the first six compartments Time 11:40 p.m. The Titanic began plunging by the bow. By 2:00 a.m., she was flooded with 39,000 tons of water. Competition, selfish ego, overconfidence, gross negligence and inferior steel had overshadowed all design and craftsmanship. The largest, safest and most luxurious ship the world had ever known was sinking. If the captain had heeded the many warnings, if the ship had struck the iceberg head on and if she had prudently steamed at 11 knots instead of 22, she would have suffered far less damage, and fewer compartments would have flooded. She would most likely have been able to complete her maiden voyage to New York. "If you look back, you can look into a cow's rear end," sailors used to say. They were all practical people; like proverbs, their witty expressions always related to daily, down-to-earth activities. This highly pictorial one for instance, had obviously been discovered during work in the many Dutch dairy galleries by people who milked cows in summer and sailed the seven seas in winter, not by those islanders who went as far as the Berends Sea to catch whales because the tailend of these huge creatures prevented easy visual access to their exit. It is interesting to note that most people are creatures of habit. Whereas the sons of the buttermilk producers preferred to go to the tropics because they were used to the warm bodies of their black-and-white animals, the more reflective tillers of the soil were attracted to the North Pole when snow and ice caused their fields to lay fallow.

IV.

Dirk was just about to finish his mental detour when the Second Officer snarled at him.

"What the hell are you doing this time?"

"Looking out, sir," hastened Dirk to reply.

"No, you're not. Have you seen that red light on starboard, then?"

Dirk was tempted to say that he had, but he quickly changed his mind.

"Eh... no sir, I haven't, but now I do; from here I couldn't see it because the starboard derrick was in the way."

"Don't try to fool me, mister," snarled his boss again.

"Don't keep standing in the one place like a frillneck; you've got to move from side to side, didn't they tell you in school?"

"Yes, sir, they did," replied Dirk meekly because, for the first time in his life, the precocious, slum raised kid felt extremely stupid.

A red light amidst some white ones. Only the red one was important of course; it belonged to a ship showing its port side. Since it was on the New Amsterdam's starboard side, it had right of way, just like vehicular traffic before the introduction of broken lines and give-way signs. Was there any danger of collision? How stupid had he

been. Daydreaming, even with eyes open, was obviously not the same as being on the lookout, so it was not as easy as he thought. The Second pulled the strings of the net a bit closer. "The red light is on the side of our green light; what does our little professor say?" Unfortunately, it didn't click. Dirk was dumbfounded; his situation became a little more precarious. "You've got to get a bearing, man; on the double! Suddenly, Dirk remembered; the ifs had it again. If the bearing of the other ship didn't alter, and if they didn't give way, collision would be the result. As soon as Dirk had reached the compass on top of the bridge, he saw the red light move rather quickly to the left; the Second Officer had already changed course, so there was no danger any longer.

When Dirk came down with his useless information, he felt not only cornered but much smaller as well. The Second was now in top form and kept up the cat-and-mouse game.

"We are now red to red; does Professor Dolittle still remember his nursery rhyme?" he asked in a rather kindergartenish voice.

"What nursery rhyme, sir," inquired Dirk.

The Second then turned to the helmsman asking him to fill the gap in the young man's knowledge. The man obliged reluctantly because he felt a bit sorry for the youngster whose smart conversation he had enjoyed a little earlier.

"Green to green or red to red, perfect safety, go ahead."

Dirk was extremely annoyed with himself; Old Jerry had mentioned it at least a dozen times. Little did he know that it referred to this particular situation.

As far as a red light was concerned, he was instantly a little less green in his eye.

A few hours later, at half past four in the morning, he was lying in his bunk, quite angry with himself. Falling asleep under those circumstances was of course out of the question because his damned thoughts kept pestering him.

His performance had been atrocious. How on earth could "little Dirk Hartog" have failed so miserably? The fact that it had happened on such a large passenger ship made it even worse. Two years of study. Two years of proudly prancing around in a star-studded battle dress and a bebadged cap. Although it couldn't possibly be compared with the pompously smart outfits of the Royal Navy cadets, it attracted enough female attention to pleasantly offset the hard work involved.

Fortunately, there had been no giggling girls on the bridge to make him blush if that were at all possible.

But wait a minute. He hadn't been in charge. He hadn't been responsible. He hadn't jeopardised the lives of more than two thousand people. O.K., he had suffered some personal humiliation. So what?

It was no more than the tip of the iceberg; no more than a cold shower to wake him up. After all, he was only a trainee; he was here to learn. This had been his first real lesson. One day, the time spent in school might perhaps pay off in some other way. He could even become the Mayor of a small community on Jupiter. At least he had learnt a lesson in only five minutes; enough to serve him a lifetime if necessary. Captain Smith hadn't learnt his lesson in twenty-six years. Ismay would never learn any lesson at all; he was far too selfishly arrogant for that. Murdoch was to blame as well. "Befehl ist Befehl" is a lousy way out. He could and should have notified the engine room earlier. He could and should have **pretended** that he had noticed something suspicious ahead. Whether it be ifs or would, could and should, history decided otherwise.

Man has always suffered under the yoke of tyrants, dictators and other idiots. Already in their embryonic state, they were programmed to perpetuate their prospective personal and poisonous powerplay as long as possible; stuff the rest. If the worst came to the worst, some would find asylum on some God-forsaken Island in the Sun, perhaps a bit more sophisticated than Pitcairn, Elba or St. Helena. They would be listening to Harry Bellafonte, no doubt. Others would have a series of heart attacks that would stop them from standing trial. Their engram "I am the greatest" prevents them from applying any brakes, reacting to red lights or even icebergs. They are demons in disguise. Their parasitic followers are mercilessly mesmerised by the psychosomatic halo that scrupulously guards the blackness that lurks beneath.

V.

While Smith was still thinking of the mermaid that woke him up, speedboat freak Ismay had made his way to the bridge.

"What's up," he yelled in the captain's newly inserted hearing aid.

"We've struck an iceberg," answered an icy voice.

"Do you think our ship has been severely damaged?"

"Not really," answered Smith even crispier than before. "It's more a question of David versus Goliath. I'm afraid David went again for a gold medal; unfortunately, there will

be neither silver nor bronze for Goliath. We were so stupid as to want to set a speed record.”

“We? Weren’t you in charge?” Ismay complemented his curiosity by pulling his face into the shape of a question mark.

“Most certainly,” agreed Smith. “However, you, the White Star managing director, made the decisions. The Carpathia, the closest ship that heard our S.O.S. signal, is on her way; it will be another five hours before reaching us. Andrews has calculated that we’ve got two hours at the most. Then we’ll set a totally different speed record; the time it takes to reach the ocean floor. I’ll see to it that we arrive safely.”

“By the way, you know of course that we only have enough lifeboats for half the number of people on board.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“Come on Mr. Ismay, your construction supervisor Thomas Andrews can tell you exactly where you tried to economise; sixteen lifeboats, a mere quarter of the original number. I find it actually suspicious that it satisfied the Board of Trade regulations. However, let’s not give each other black looks. As soon as I know that we will have to lower the boats, I want women and children to go first; with them we will have used up half the life saving capacity. Those in charge of the boats will decide who will then be eligible.

One thousand people will have to jump; I hope you’ve had some swimming lessons, Mr. Ismay.” Fifth Officer Harold Lowe who was in charge of boat 14 had been eavesdropping; he had caught most of the conversation and he was happy to learn that the captain had taken control again. When Captain Smith had finally given the order to lower the boats, quartermaster George Rowe started to fire rockets into the sky in order to attract the attention of possible ships nearby. The fact that no one on the Californian had seen these distress signals, had raised many an eyebrow. Their radio operator could not be blamed; when he reported that his ship was surrounded by ice, Phillips on the Titanic had told him to shut up because he was busy sending telegrams. Since the good man went to bed, he never heard the Mayday call. But what about the others? There were at least three men on duty; the officer, the helmsman and the lookout. Considering their precarious situation, the captain was no doubt on duty as well. Was it because they themselves were in trouble or was it perhaps to teach the snobs a lesson? No way in the world could the captain have silenced the others. Sooner or later, the conscience of at

least one of them would have played up, especially after knowing the extent of the disaster.

So the question is not whether they actually **saw** the rockets, but rather whether they **could have seen** them. The distance of the horizon is given by the rule-of-thumb formula $D=5 \sqrt{H/2}$ m. If, and only if the rockets reached 72 metres, they could have been spotted 30 kms away. If, and only if the bridge of the Californian was 8 metres above sealevel, their horizon would have been 10 km away. Since that ship was said to be only one hour away and the total horizon distance was approximately 21 nautical miles, I leave answering the question to you, the reader.

Harold Lowe's happiness didn't last long. Ismay had appointed himself lifeboat commander, because bullies are always cowards. He was busy organising people left, right and centre.

"Get lost!" shouted Lowe while pushing him aside. "What would you bloody well know about lowering boats!"

Initially it was almost impossible to convince people that danger was imminent. It is not so very difficult to figure out why. Unlike the deceiving designers of bewildering brochures that cause compulsive travellers to gullibly gaze at romantically displayed dunnies, and that seduce them to read and swallow the exotic descriptions of a semi-sacred bungalow in Bali, with the intention to make them believe that they are going to enjoy bed-and-breakfast in the Taj Mahal, Ismay had informed his captive audience rather well; his bait was more than just a good-looking shrimp.

To entice millionaires and would-be ones, the stakes have to be high, excessively high.

Those bejewelled actors suffering from an engrammed self-importance readily accepted by the clique of surrounding parasitic beings, are only interested in superlatives. Ismay had satisfied that desire. His brainwashing was of a totally different kind; HIS TITANIC WAS UNSINKABLE.

No other company could possibly offer such a deal; only God Ismay could. Stories of the many ships that had left the treacherous aquatic surface forever to exchange human life for that of a myriad of minuscule marine organisms, subdivided into hierarchies ad infinitum, were outside their realm. More than a thousand wrecks lie spellbound in the deep-sea graveyard around the Cape of Good Hope, a name once coined by the Dutch. "Keep your fingers crossed," would have been a better name. Ismay's ship would never suffer such a banal setback.

Being lowered in a nutshell down towards the unknown icy and lonely darkness was like descending into Hell. The choice between that and Ismay's warm heaven was not subject to a toss-up. So while uncertainty thus inhibited the minds of many, Ismay knew better; he was one of the first ones to get into a lifeboat. He blatantly ignored the captain's specific order. Out of the goodness of his heart, he encouraged men to join their wives willy nilly. The real reason of course was to make his male cowardice less obvious. It was definitely no coincidence either that first-class passengers were favoured. In the strict human plane, nobody would have objected if someone had called Ismay a con-man and a bastard.

Unfortunately, if we can, for a moment, visualise the tiny lifecapsules, half full of even tinier, relatively insignificant, vulnerable human creatures drifting amidst the icefields surrounded by God's towering Icebergs, then we realise that Dirk's Organising Source does not think or act in terms of human trivia. The fact that humans act the way they do is only a survival mechanism, definitely not one to attach any special significance to.

The task of the Organising Source is one of keeping balance. So above, so below. The Universal clockwork is in perpetual motion... until the sun sets. Even the opposites of good and bad, of God and Devil are necessary; good alone is stagnant. If all people were healthy angels, 90% of the population would be out of work.

For years, I thought that we ought to go back to the simple ancient Turkish procedure of cutting off a stealing hand or a raping prick. The clockwork itself couldn't possibly run on emotions.

Expressing or suppressing them is strictly a human necessity although it could be compared to the Titanic's huge boilers letting off steam in order to function without exploding. Newspapers thrive on these safety valves opening up.

Ismay was not alone in using cunning behaviour. Some bitch of noble appearance grabbed a young child in order to gain preference. It reminds me of World Vision advertisements where a socially prominent and attractive blonde cuddles a starving Ethiopian blackling. Many however, displayed dignity and duty. Some even dressed up for the morbid occasion as if attending someone else's funeral. Others continued playing cards. Several women refused to leave their husbands probably because a lonely widowhood with relentless nightmares seemed a worse proposition.

Workers in the boiler- and engine rooms toiled frantically to keep the waterpumps, the lights and the wireless going. When Smith told them to look after their own lives, they

kept going to their bitterly cold end, and so did the band. Before boarding a lifeboat, one second-class passenger put in a complaint to one of the many stewards who were seriously setting the tables for an elusive breakfast. As if she was going shopping, she expected the toilet to be installed in her cabin on her return. It proves once again that you can believe in anything if you want to. The need for fairy tales is typically human. Ismay knew it. Ismay had made use of it. Dirk woke up when the Titanic went down. The trainee in the bunk above kept snoring. Dirk was exhausted and soaking wet when a sailor brought him a cup of tea. Apprentices have to perform two hours of practical work; after all, you can only teach when you have learnt. The ordinary folk used to poke fun at them; they received the would-be officers with open arms, especially when the jobs to be done had nothing to do with lessons learnt in school. On passenger ships, the wooden decks have to be spotlessly clean; for that to happen it's down on your knees, not to pray, but to scrub, to scrub, to endlessly scrub. It's good to come down to earth now and then. Dirk remembered how Harold Lowe had described the facial expressions of the dead floating around in the icy waters. He kept scrubbing with a smile on his face.

VI.

Five years later, Dirk had managed to become a Second Officer himself. During the so-called Dog Watch - from midnight till 4 a.m. - it was **he** who tested the trainee. As a matter of course, article 16 and the definition of a safe speed were on the program although his approach was a bit more entertaining and instructive than that of his old boss. He would demonstrate with pen, paper and plenty of personal persuasion that a maximum speed could still be a safe one provided the ship could be stopped within half the visibility. Invariably, the Titanic provided the example of not heeding that golden rule. Since his first trip, he had passed over her grave umpteen times, because he had gone through his ranks on one and the same Liner, the New Amsterdam. Dirk had studied and perfected the art of socialising, albeit for his own benefit, though it was of considerable importance on a passenger ship as well, no different from the prerequisites of a good shopkeeper. This expertise raised him a cut above the rest. No wonder the managing director Reuchlin Junior who regularly travelled on the ship, was well pleased with him.

Reuchlin's father, of noble birth, had been a passenger on the Titanic. Unlike his "friend" and colleague Ismay, he had chosen to meet his destiny in dignity like so many others. He drowned.

Dirk's specialty was just an extra arrow to launch from Cupid's bow. It was an accepted and sophisticated way to introduce the mating process and to enhance the chance of satisfying one's primitive, biological needs. It was totally different from the abrupt cow-bull approach or worse, the artificial insemination process, merely organised for commercial purposes. Dirk's way could be compared to the corroboree of bowerbirds chirping and dancing the blues under their twig twisted porches.

Normally, Second Officers were not allowed to mingle with passengers, but Dirk was always exempt from that restriction. He enjoyed therefore the same privileges as the Captain, the First Officer, the Chief Engineer and the Doctor.

He loved Gershwin and he could even play some of his compositions on the piano. "Do what you do" was his favourite because it caused the well-dressed loitering ladies to longingly look at him.

During these trips, time had to be killed; the promiscuous unknown was beckoning. Sensuality reached an all-time high; bodies were eagerly waiting. Dirk was well aware of it. Everything he had inherited or learnt contributed to spinning his personal web of pleasure. He turned out to be an excellent M.C., always busy initiating games when the occasion seemed to be right and when time permitted him to do so.

His superficial familiarity with horoscopy was used to carry the intimacy a bit further. The drawing of charts with zodiacal data was within reach of every old-fashioned navigator. A cursory know-how of numerology, tarot cards, palmistry, runes and I Ching didn't go astray either.

No captain was game to refuse if those well-dressed loitering ladies asked permission to have the Second Officer enlighten them when the light at the end of their personal tunnel had temporarily been switched off. Unfortunately for them, Dirk only managed to extend the tunnel. However, the excitement of these warm moments was enough to make it work for both; a birthday is only an excuse to have a party.

Dirk was obviously not a devoted professional in these matters, but one couldn't call him a fake or a quack either. He just happened to be a leader. A leader is someone who has followers, immaterial of what he has to offer. The world is full of gimmicky gurus. Dirk's ultimate aim was to find the quickest way to the cabin of one of these tempting ladies. Needless to say that the distance to it had to be covered in all secrecy in order to

avoid any jealous gossip. Evil tongues were only too keen to inform headoffice as well. Once caught stark naked, the prospect of ever boarding a passenger ship was near nil; a tramp steamer was the reward. No horoscopes, no Gershwin, no occasions to apply one's carnal knowledge.

On one of these Atlantic crossings, Dirk was introduced to a rather attractive and flamboyant looking American woman of Irish descent. Caitlin Kennedy her name was. Her long, waving hair, the same colour as her numerous freckles, reached beyond her bony shoulders to comfortably nestle itself into the hollows on either side of her voluptuous peaches. The streamlined contours of the body below them seemed to complement the beauty above. Caitlin was a practising psychologist. Not long after their first meeting, Dirk's crystal balls got a thorough shake-up. She made fun of him when she discovered his cunning way of making use of the data his captive audience had unwittingly given him. Apart from the advantages already mentioned, Caitlin had something in common with Dirk. It turned out that they were born on the same day in the same year: a Titanical coincidence. As a result, their horoscopes had to be identical. Her laughter filled the cabin when Dirk's method proved to be a total disaster. According to his calculations, they had absolutely nothing in common. Whether or not Dirk himself believed in his seances was not important any longer. Caitlin had destroyed his image; his deck of cards consisted of nothing but jokers. From that moment onwards, Caitlin took over, at least as probing into people's future was concerned.

When Dirk looked at her with a vacant look, she took a box of matches that happened to be handy. She emptied it out on the table, stating that she could define his personality merely by staring at the way the matchsticks were distributed. Not only was the analysis spot on, but Dirk was flabbergasted by her quasi-scientific way of going about it. Caitlin burst out laughing again when she noticed his puzzled face. Poor Dirk; until now, he had always been in control. Caitlin bluffed her way in a bit further by telling him that she would have come up with the same verdict had the box of matches remained unopened. For the first time, extrovert Dirk the Great was lost for words. However, that very silence turned out to be a catalyst in the changeover from the verbal to the vacuum in his soul. In order to replace it with something worthwhile, it was inevitable that he fell in love with her. The obscure prophecies of the Oracle of Amsterdam had paid off so far, but now they had become obsolete. The Organising Source had acted again.

VII.

Caitlin's ancestors were poor peasants from Ireland who had migrated to America during the potato famine. Gradually, the name Kennedy started to ring a bell, however. Her great-uncle had become filthy rich during the Prohibition years. Already at an early age, his son had become a Massachusetts Senator and a promising candidate for the presidency, owing to the considerable wealth to back him. Caitlin on the other hand, had to pay for her studies by working as a cashier in a drugstore. Although she hadn't been exposed to the same luxuries as her cousins, she was nevertheless as brainy and libidinous as they were. Despite his collapsed fortune telling empire, Dirk was definitely able to foresee what Caitlin was hiding behind her blouse and skirt. They made love unashamedly. They were always hungry for more. The beads of their abacus changed places on a daily basis and so did the venues. Soon, the number of lusty encounters was beyond its capacity. They didn't have time to count. After all, they were interested in quality, not quantity. In the beginning, they actually used to keep track of temporary couples stealthily sliding in and out of cabins, but after a while, they were less attentive to the adventures of others.

Just before steaming into Rotterdam Harbour, Caitlin asked if Dirk liked the idea of living together, preferably in Amsterdam because that world renown city had somehow taken her fancy.

Dirk immediately thought of the red light on their starboard side when he was still a trainee. His navigational instinct was tempted to change course, but his emotional and physical urgency kept him going, even without taking a bearing first. After all, a collision between two partners was not a matter of life and death. Besides, Caitlin's tropical behaviour would melt icebergs like icecream in the midday sun. As it so happened, Dirk planned to spend his six months paid leave there anyway in order to study for his first mate's ticket, so he hesitantly agreed to try out this semi-marital status. They must have had a fairly good relationship going, for as soon as he passed all his exams cum laude, he got the crazy idea to walk into the headoffice of the main local newspaper to see if they needed a journalist. Crazier still, they did. After all, Joseph Conrad had also become a newspaper man, so why not Dirk.

In order to test his craftsmanship, they had saddled him up with two assignments; one current affairs one and one documentary, no more than a thousand words each.

For the first one, he decided to write about the presidential elections in America; the race between Kennedy and Nixon. Caitlin had enough material on it to fill a book.

The second one was going to be an appraisal of a recently published book entitled “A Night to Remember” by Walter Lord. Since the subsequent film produced was quite good, it seemed a worthwhile choice.

Apart from that, the author provides us with some startling news about the behaviour of his namesake Captain Lord of the Californian:

Captain Smith **did** see the lights of the steamer which lay to because of the surrounding icefields. Since she must have been no more than about ten miles away, he actually told the people in boat 8 to go over, land its passengers and come back for more.

At one point, apprentice Gibson on the Californian thought that the strange ship that had come up from the East and had not moved for a whole hour, tried to signal with a morse lamp, but then he decided that her masthead light was merely flickering. At 12:45, Second Officer Stone saw the first rocket go up. By one o'clock, he and Gibson had already counted six. When Stone warned Captain Lord, the latter advised him to keep morsing. Although both men were convinced that the rockets hadn't been fired for fun, especially since it was not New Year's Eve, they watched the strange ship slowly disappear. The fact that she was listing didn't seem to ring a bell. By two o'clock, her lights seemed very low on the horizon, so the two men felt that she must be steaming away.

Although Captain Lord had been notified again at 2:05 and 2:40, it was not until 5:40 that he decided to wake up the wireless operator. When he heard that the Titanic had sunk, he immediately started his engines. When he arrived at the scene of the accident, the Carpathia had just picked up the last lifeboat.

Although the quality of the assignments was sufficient to get him the job, the remuneration was going to be half the amount he was used to. Fortunately, Caitlin had learnt enough Dutch in the meantime to work as a secretary at the American Embassy. The combined incomes were thus enough to get by.

Since Dirk didn't want to throw all his eggs into the one basket, he went to the headoffice of the Holland-America Line to inform them that he had obtained his first mate's ticket.

His enthusiastic entry was somewhat dampened by the surly, half bespectacled employment officer whom he never liked anyway. When the man had finished adding the given information to Dirk's file, he put down his pen, looked detectively over the edge of his magnifiers and said sneeringly, “By the way, news on the grapevine has

made us aware of your frolicsome activities with an American female passenger on board the New Amsterdam.”

“That news is totally correct, sir,” answered Dirk triumphantly. “We’ve lived together for the past six months, so I actually came here to hand in my resignation before you decide to put me on one of your trampsteamers.”

“Now wait a minute, that’s what I hadn’t mentioned yet,” retreated the man meekly.

“I don’t like your **not yet**; you only want to have the satisfaction of remaining the big shot,” said Dirk cheekily. He knew the ratrace between colleagues.

He knew the Company’s mode of bluffing: “We don’t need you, at least ten others are eagerly waiting to fill your position.”

Dirk was nevertheless aware of his importance to them.

When the employment officer contacted the managing director to tell him what had happened, the latter immediately wanted to see his protege.

“What the hell are you doing, my boy,” he asked.

“I’ve decided to become a journalist, Sir Reuchlin; as a matter of fact, I’ve already been offered a job with the Amsterdam Morning Herald.”

“A journalist? You didn’t study to be a journalist.”

“Yes, sir, I’ve got my diplomas of the Maritime Institute.”

Reuchlin burst out laughing, but his involuntary reaction didn’t last long. He was on the verge of apologising on behalf of the telltales, but contained himself just in time, because he was ashamed of having been part in the conspiracy of Dirk’s colleagues. In order to offload his guilty feelings, he tried a bit of sarcasm and bribed, “You know of course that seamen have a much more liberal outlook than others.” Dirk didn’t fall for it; instead, he hit the ball back into Reuchlin’s already diminished court. “That’s why the Titanic sank, sir.”

After winning the set, he explained that he was not cut out to stay at sea all his life, shook hands with a smile and left, assuring that, one day, he would write an article on the Holland-America Line in which he would, without even feeling hypocritical, highly praise the company for its excellent and reliable shuttle service between Europe and America and symbolically compare it with the huge, green tinted copper arches above the Board of Directors’ office overlooking the harbour and prominently situated at the end of the pier named after the grandmother of the present Queen of The Netherlands.

On his return home, he presumptuously told Caitlin that he had not only changed his career by becoming a journalist, but that he was actually going to become the Joseph Conrad of the Low Lands.

“If you’re not successful, you can always become an astrologer,” joked Caitlin with a grin on her befreckled face.

She rather liked the change in circumstances.

Their probationary period was to last more than half a century. The secret behind this unusual record was the fact that, during all that time, they remained engaged to be married. Needless to say that it would be years before Dirk could call himself a journalist; he was an apprentice once again.

He started his new adventure as a sports reporter; doubling up on a motorbike at bicycle races, huddling in windy grandstands during soccer games, repetitively turning his head watching tennis tournaments or table tennis games, much like one of those colourful, open-mouthed clowns deceptively eager to receive the ping pong ball thrown by a hopeful youngster visiting the Royal Easter Show.

From that emotional and tumultuous type of entertainment he was promoted to reporting on a totally different one. No cheering or booing in the Courts. The legal struggle between solicitors or barristers in front of judges bedecked with their powdered Louis XIV-type wigs, was a serious one; the stiff upper lips of the attendants emphasised it.

Even the occasional “Judge Judy” case didn’t give him satisfaction, but at least it was closer to what made him tick: the theatrical side of life, so ultimately he combined his expertise as a film critic with his hobby of gathering more and more information on space technology and especially on the Titanic because the amount of stories surrounding the myth exceeded the size of the biggest iceberg floating in the North Atlantic. Books, films, documentaries, discussions, you name it, one followed the other.

VIII.

After scrutinising many of them, Dirk decided to review his original article that dealt with the question of who was to blame for the sinking. He wrote:

When the Carpathia carrying the Titanic survivors docked in New York Harbour on April 18, 1912, the newspaper men were of course eagerly waiting on the pier. Many even accompanied the ship in small boats from as far away as the Statue of Liberty.

Since that moment, they didn’t let go of the poor “victims” who gave statements that

either tallied with others, or that were totally contradictory, because under those horrendous circumstances, the mind had obviously become rather erratic due to shocked emotions.

Hundreds of writers and journalists began delving into the sea of details, each one of them concentrating on a different aspect.

In order to stem the possible influx of nonsensical stories that would lead to an infinite number of mini disasters, Senator William Alden Smith, member for Michigan and chairman of the hastily convened Senate Committee, was one of the first ones to leap up the gangway in the company of Federal Police Officers with bundles of subpoenas under their arms.

The Senator, with the most unfortunate name of Smith, was to spend five weeks interviewing more than 80 witnesses. J. Bruce Ismay was of course the premier target. During the roasting, arrogance and childish innocence interchanged according to the questions asked. Before the hearing, his New York lawyer wanted to know why he had obtained a seat in one of the lifeboats.

“Why wouldn’t I have got into one,” Ismay rebuffed.

The lawyer knew better and modified the answer given.

When Smith asked the same question, Ismay had learnt to say, “The boat was only half full, and there were no more women and children waiting on the boatdeck.”

The Committee had no choice but to accept Ismay’s version. However, the general public didn’t. Ismay’s inventions were often meaningless because his lawyer had briefed him well; Ismay was always on the alert.

In the meantime, the media made sure that they kept ahead of the Committee with statements gathered from survivors. Cartoonists had a ball. Subtitles like, “Ah, I see! Going to whitewash the White Star,” translated the feeling of the man in the street.

The privileges enjoyed by the rich and gentry was the topic of the day.

On the other hand, special mention was made of the crew members who kept going courageously even when the situation was beyond their control, of the many prominent passengers who had either patiently waited their turn or had decided to die with dignity, and last, but not least, of the musicians who finished with, “Nearer my God to Thee.”

The Senator should not be criticised for being somewhat biased, but the crazy questions he asked the officers showed that the ex-railway advocate’s knowledge of maritime

matters was totally inadequate and more suitable for a comedian's repertoire. It is even possible to imagine the laughter of the audience.

"Did the Titanic's bow go down first or her front end?"

He was so stupid as to ask Captain Stanley Lord of the Californian whether he had dropped anchor amongst the ice fields.

The press got of course plenty of mileage out of this extended slip of the tongue by explaining that the anchor could only have been effective in water three miles deep, if the chain had been ten miles long.

The weight of the chain alone would have been enough to sink the ship.

Fifth Officer Harold Lowe copped the best one yet.

"What did the iceberg consist of?" "Of ice, your honour," he replied with a straight face. An Australian would have agreed with him by saying, "You're not wrong," because they prefer to approach a subject from the safe side. The comedian got of course a standing ovation. The newspapers called the Senator "The watertight Smith."

Apart from these hiccups, he nevertheless managed to compile a report consisting of more than one thousand one hundred pages, highlighting the most important facts. It dealt with life and death, with bravery and cowardice, with panic and pandemonium, with pettiness and paradigm, with paralysis, parasites and paradise, with "God for us all and Man for himself."

Out of all the newspapers, the New York Times disclosed the most trustworthy details. It kept up that standard until the present day, consistently ignoring the metamorphosis of the facts and the birth of a legend. While Orpheus went down to Hades, Phoenix rose from the ashes.

IX.

The Brits were fuming. How was it possible that these bloody Americans dared to meddle with their affairs! Joseph Conrad, the famous writer who specialised in analysing shipping disasters, wrote, "The reason why a British Merchant Navy Officer was interrogated by foreigners is beyond me, especially since the questions asked related to the misfortunes of a British ship in International waters." Conrad was the pen name of Josef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, an ex-naval officer from Poland, although all his books were written in English.

Theoretically, he was right of course, but he obviously ignored the fact that the lives of many Americans had been lost, apart from the commercial side of it. On the third of May, 1912, the English started their investigation under the chairmanship of Sir John Charles Bingham. All the important actors in this classic tragedy had to be present at the dress rehearsal; not unlike the unfinished maiden voyage, the premiere never eventuated. The proceedings were instigated by the British Board of Trade, the Authority responsible for the execution of the British Maritime Safety Laws. The fact that some of them were totally outdated showed up when it was revealed that the Titanic had actually one lifeboat more than was required.

Consequently, the Board was not at all interested in finding out whether or not the White Star Line had been guilty of gross negligence; it would spoil the image of the British supremacy at sea. Claims would cause White Star to go bankrupt; the Germans and the French would only be too keen to take over a large part of the lucrative shipping trade. Moreover, the Titanic had been built according to the Board's own specifications. It's unwise to dirty one's own nest; the golden eggs wouldn't hatch.

Sir Rufus Isaacs, an experienced barrister in his heyday, assisted the Right Honourable Lord Mersey. He was the one who, in the end, saved the Board's necks, because it is not a question of what you know but rather whom you know. The claims were declared null and void. The Board had actually the hide to make the relatives of violinist Jack Hume pay 14 shillings, 7 pence to offset the cost of his uniform.

According to the Peter Principle, incompetence doesn't only run riot in the Halls of Education, but also in every staid Hierarchy under the sun.

That's why it was not the first time that such a corrupt group of illustrious dickheads consisting of pot-bellied socialites, got away with murder.

It took the British Admiralty three hundred years before they issued Captain Cook with citrus fruit to stave off scurvy.

It didn't come as a surprise either that Captain Lord of the Californian took the brunt of the blame; if not for his negligence, then at least for his inertia. As always, Time is the ultimate Judge; it is the most powerful device of the Organising Source.

Captain Smith, initially seen as the hero who made his honourable exit, and therefore blessed with a statue erected in the place where he made his entry, became guiltier and guiltier.

There's no two ways about it: he should have respected article 16, the very one for which he had, for years, dragged out of their bunks, all new apprentice officers in order

to make them recite it in one single breath. Since the ultimate responsibility rests on the shoulders of the Captain, Ismay's guilt was definite, although not to the same degree. Even First Officer Murdoch couldn't possibly go scot-free; after all, he was on duty. Captain Lord's negligence remains dubious. Edward Smith chose to be a dead hero rather than a living coward. As a matter of fact, it was not really a choice at all. An unwritten law states that a captain is doomed to go down with a sinking ship because he has to be the last living creature to leave it.

Since there will always be rats and cockroaches, his chance of surviving is slimmer than the slimmest Slim Dusty.

Ismay only knew the written law that lifeboats are to be used in case of emergency. He continued his life, but it was never the same again as it was before. The feeling of guilt that comes from within lasts until the visit to the mortuary; the verdict imposed from without is only temporary.

Over the years, Dirk wrote at least sixty articles and essays on the Titanic. In the beginning, neither the Americans nor the French or the English had established whether the ship had broken in two or whether she had ploughed into the seabed in one piece. The testimonies given were not very helpful either although the current opinion seemed to favour the second possibility.

It was not until September 1, 1985, that Ballard's team discovered that the stern had actually come to rest 2000 feet away from the bow.

Immediately after the tragedy, dozens of lunatics came up with ideas of how to float the ship. Relatives had contracted some of them to help find the remains of their loved ones in order to give them a decent burial. Every amateur scientist could see that all these ideas would only work in The Land of the Faeries. In order to take the Micky out of these pseudo inventors, Dirk made a huge collage of the Titanic full of ping pong balls. The subtitle read, "This will certainly make her float." He soon discovered that his pictorial joke had travelled the world in a relatively short time; a few publications had actually misconstrued it as a serious option. Dirk kept collecting the articles published in the New York Times because he kept in touch with their reporters. Eventually, all 700 survivors had told their story. They organised regular reunions because they had founded a kind of survivors club with its own newsletter. If someone had died, the N.Y.T. would always commemorate the person's tragic experiences while mentioning to what extent the aftermath of the disaster had affected the rest of his or her life.

X.

One midsummer evening, he was busy working on his docudrama “Noblesse Oblige” in the spacious garden of their house on the corner of two dead-end streets on the outskirts of a rural village. The cows opposite were peacefully chewing their cud; a bleating lamb was looking for its mother. Apart from the serene surroundings, the theme of his drama was by definition human, not pastoral. It dealt with ethics, the philosophy that someone of noble birth had not only privileges, but also duties which were obviously more than just providing shelter and food for the family. They referred to more distinguished qualities like the courage, the heroic and the virtuous behaviour of the knights who dominated the medieval world during the glorious Age of Chivalry and Romance.

Like the Titanic, the Knight is a topic that still fascinates and intrigues. Knights were either spotless heroes or unscrupulous opportunists who, on occasion, were little better than bandits in their lust for land and loot, for greed and glory. We have already met the two types in our story.

One can become a hero in a split second. The medals on the chests of the few remaining Anzacs are a living testimony. Oblivious of their own safety, they attended to a wounded mate. One cannot possibly learn to become a hero, hence there are no commercial courses pretending to make you reach that special status.

Heroism is the gift of The Organising Source; at least fifty percent of our life is a package deal.

Heroism is already in the conception, not necessarily an immaculate one, but definitely not a contra.

The chance to become a hero might never eventuate. Heroism is a dormant quality. It operates either as a reflex, quick as the cork catapulting from the neck of a celebrating bottle of champagne, or slow, but persistent like the lifeforce in the rock-splitting seed of a Morton Bay Fig.

Cowardice is as unprepared as the involuntary emission of intestinal gas from the anus of an animal. A coward has never been in awe of Mother Nature, not even of his own; he is the first one to grab the biggest slice of birthday cake or the last lolly out of the lonely jar. He has never discovered that, from a Qantas jet taking off from Mascot, he is soon reduced in size from that of a crawling ant to a dirty speck of dust in the Simpson Desert. Both cowardice and heroism only operate in extreme situations. A hero understands life, he cherishes it. He knows that the Organising Source is in charge of arrivals and departures, not much different from the greengrocer separating the good

apples and the rotten ones. Everyone is born with an expiry date; it is not up to us to argue with the Creator of Things.

We have already paid tribute to the many heroes that went down:

Faithful wives who had only gone down with the lifeboats after their husbands had pleaded with them to do so. It was not just their survival instinct that had taken over; they had allowed their knights to make that sacrifice. He would die with the most beautiful memories of her; she would live with the most beautiful memories of him because memories are made of this. Ida Straus on the other hand, had taken off her expensive furcoat and given it to her servant saying, "You'll need it more than I do." She chose to forgo the memories and stay with her husband Isidor. Together they had founded Macy's, the famous superstore. Together they would await the wild waters. When the bandleader had finally put his violin in its case, he turned to his colleagues and said, "Gentlemen, it has been an honour to play with you." They all arrived at St. Peter's Golden Gate in style.

Ismay however, was already dreaming of a new Titanic, one even more luxurious than his previous prized possession. He looked so pale that everyone thought he had died as well. St. Peter told him that He had to check first to see whether there was still a vacancy in the heavenly lifeboat; when He came back, the Gate was gone.

It was no use wondering whether we were wishfully walking in the footsteps of the imaginary figures created by historians and reporters. The Titanic stories are no different from the fairytales, the parables and the proverbs.

What's the use of presenting a disappointing past; we've never yet learnt from it. The past is gone, the future is already here. It is important to keep portraying the good, the god, the ideal. A soccerfield must have goalposts; it doesn't mean that every shot is successful, but at least there is something to aim for. As a matter of fact, all games are a symbolic aim for the ultimate.

Don't worry about evil; don't judge how bad things are; they will automatically follow the good. Good and bad are like Siamese twins; they keep the Universal balance. Reality lies in the paradox. In a modern society, someone's misery becomes someone else's entertainment.

This was not the first time that Caitlin and Dirk were brainstorming about what had made Ida and Isidor tick. To begin with, they were fair dinkum. They were more than

just wealthy. They were respected and prominent business people who realised that there was not much money in garments to wrap up dead bodies alone. They had learnt that enough was already too much. Besides, they were in their late sixties; they had enjoyed life to the full; what more did they want? By leaving together, they would avoid the possible trauma of one.

An old person might not only understand the temporary nature of things a bit better, but if his body is deteriorating, the opportunity to go might even be more acceptable. A youngster whose hopes are going to be squashed and whose curiosity for the unknown will never be satisfied, is less likely to accept fate.

In the final second however, the elderly person might regret his unfinished agenda.

Suddenly, a gentle breeze took hold of some petunia petals that had prematurely fallen onto the ground. It was not difficult to guess why it blew away Dirk's thoughts as well in order to replace them with more bestial ones. When the petals had disappeared, his eyes went back to the purple, funnel-shaped flowers proudly pointing upwards. This simple, silent spectacle was enough to arouse him, so when Caitlin arrived with tea and biscuits, he followed the flowing movements of her thin, flower patterned silk skirt around the back of her knees. According to him, she wore nothing underneath.

Would it be possible that she ...? What the heck!

It was the right weather for these provocative outfits.

He looked at the grassy carpet in front of the high hedge; the neighbours wouldn't stand a chance, besides, it had always been their favourite spot. "I've got an idea," he said while sipping his tea. "So do I," she cut him short. "I want you to count all the freckles on my thighs," she giggled while dragging him towards the perfect place for predestined pleasure. He was right. Her silk was nothing more than the untaped, unribboned wrapping of her Christmas in July present to him. She started to roll it down to her umbilical aperture, while he rolled it up to meet her; a kind of mid-riff bandanna was the result. Caitlin had obviously done her warm-up while preparing her soothing camomile tea. "Come on Mr. Romeo, out with it; put that hot rod of yours in my primed pussy," she urged him crudely. Dirk didn't have to be told twice. He recognised the urgency; he knew the kettle was boiling. The freeway to the holy grail was open. His pogo stick soon worked overtime.

XI.

Caitlin and Dirk regularly travelled on cargo ships with accommodation for a few passengers. Sometimes paying their way, sometimes as crew members; he as an extra second mate doing the Dog Watch, she as a pseudo linen matron which allowed her to mix with the rank and file. The setting was ideal to satisfy her gregarious nature. She listened in amazement to the typical men's jargon used to express their endless sexual fantasies while having smoko, because that's all they had in the middle of the ocean. It had nothing to do with linguistics; all words and expressions had lost their original meaning and could become a vagina. Anything phallic would be used in making up jokes. It would be impossible to compile a glossary of words exclusively relating to the genitalia: the testicles and the penis of a male or the labia, clitoris and vagina of a female. After a while, it would be obsolete, because desperate minds keep inventing. It proves that the biological urge cannot be ignored; it even drives some people to unacceptable conduct. The fact that a judge sets the penalty according to the Law, doesn't necessarily mean that he is not one of those himself. His lawful verdict has nothing to do with his uncontrolled urge, although we would expect him to be the epitome of virtue. Initially, the sailors would refrain from using their special lingo when Caitlin was around, but it gradually changed when they discovered that Caitlin herself had come down to their standard.

She was always eager to share the variations on her crown jewel with Dirk; the latest additions were truffle, mussel and oyster.

Sometimes he even wondered whether he was subject to jealousy or whether he was genuinely concerned that she would excite the men too much with all these inventions; after all, they were at sea for months on end; often for weeks without seeing or touching a woman.

Caitlin had already jumped the taboo-line years before, when she was still at school. She knew that deeds not words counted. She also realised that swearwords and three-letter words were usually uttered without the thought of context.

Although the smoko sessions were like a kind of mental foreplay, they only created a pleasant procrastination with the hope for further development. As soon as work resumed however, the turtles withdrew into their shells and the heavenly compartment became watertight again.

Only the less gullible, experienced men were aware of this harmless, fornicating fun. They had learnt that it often resulted in a disappointing performance. A promiscuous

sounding woman could turn out to be as freezing cold as the Titanic iceberg. Her bodily reaction, influenced by orthodox rules and regulations or a traumatic past, was then obviously not in tune with her wishful mind.

Caitlin was not so happy with the provocative label Dirk had bestowed on her. Apart from the superficial equality, there was a definite gap in status, that's why Dirk was always referred to as Mr. Second. Despite the presence of higher ranking officers including the captain, he was considered to be the top man or the go-between. Consequently, she automatically became Lady Caitlin.

Relations on a ship are authoritarian; they are based on rank and therefore importance. Answers to orders given by Officers invariably ended in "Sir".

Caitlin believed in shock therapy. She could, at will, change from catechism to climax. She had studied catharsis, a method of bringing repressed ideas and experiences to consciousness by means of free associations or any other device that would relieve underlying tensions.

Her psychoanalytical approach was not always meant to be therapeutical.

By throwing up a few unexpected coarse expressions, she could occasionally sense the disruption it had caused in the mind of the listener. She liked to throw all her cards on the table. People always finished up realising that the two Caitlins were in reality one person of wholesome royalty.

"What would you say if your Queen farted?" she teased him.

"That was a beauty, Your Majesty!" he managed to say while he burst out laughing.

"That is exactly what Sir Francis Drake said to Queen Elizabeth 1 when she inadvertently produced a thunderous one while visiting The Tower of London; the echo of the royal blast lasted a few seconds before being absorbed by the royal surrounds. The mishap didn't cause Sir Francis to become fresh.

On the contrary, he was honoured by the ultimate confidence she unmistakably had in him. As a matter of fact, she wouldn't have dropped an eyelid if he had seen her wrapped up in her medieval corset."

"Or if he had offered to pull the strings to make her slimmer," invented Dirk.

In his adventurous mind, he already pictured himself doing the same to the Dutch Queen. "Precisely! By reducing the gap, the Queen had become at once untouchable. You just don't screw a goddess. Amongst themselves, sailors would just call me Kate, not Lady Caitlin. They might even change it to Cuntlin; they would talk about Cuntlin's

truffle. The fantasies about what they could and would do with me will be countless. The anticlimax is that they would never try to execute them.”

Gradually, this seaman’s jargon became common property.

“A woman’s vaginal lips are a curse on ships,” was the traditional saying.

It meant that the men were usually mature enough not to succumb to their desire to kiss them except in their imagination.

Caitlin knew that they had themselves on; somewhere along the line, they were more vulnerable than they thought, because the stallion in them desperately wanted to mount the mare in season.

After World War II, Caitlin had studied sexuality; it was part of her course in psychology. She was now in a position to test the lessons learnt.

She remembered the days that the men had turned her into someone practically non-terrestrial, or rather non-neptunic.

She remembered their initial, mutual bashfulness. The more they had exchanged their stories, the further she got away from, not only her own femininity, but also from the joke about the Original Sin. Can you imagine a world with only two people of the opposite sex? Can you imagine Adam only staring at Eve dressed in the tiniest bikini ever designed? Can you imagine the turmoil he must have been in? She didn’t need lipstick; she was ripe, ready to be harvested.

The Organising Source would never have been that disorganised in planning.

He would have known that temptation and sin were part of his own balancing act. He would not have played the role of Pontius Pilate; there wouldn’t have been enough water under the bridge to wash His hands in.

Hence, He wouldn’t have been like hypocritical governments giving orders to label cigarette wrappers with the warning that smoking kills while honestly believing it would change the mind of the smoke inhaling victims.

He wouldn’t have been like the same government making betting illegal except in an organised, government controlled way or on Anzac Day.

He wouldn’t have been like their opposition either and benefit from the God-damned pokies while condemning the fact that Aussies even beat the Chinese in gambling. Their only excuse could be that the raked-in revenue is used to widen the roads to make pubs and tabs more accessible, as well as regularly increasing ministerial salaries by 15 per cent.

If males and females were to be used exclusively to continue human life on Earth, He would not have turned copulation into pleasure. He would have made it a bitter experience for medicinal purposes only and to be kept out of reach of children as well. At any other time, the female procreational contraption would be like a rattrap with vaginal cheese to lure and lay off any trespassers. Most of the time, men would be like a sultan's eunuch. Children would not play fathers and mothers, or doctors and nurses any longer. A prematurely excited finger would not serve as a thermometer. Many a child would not be fondled by a childish hand. There would be no point in having sexy tattoos, diamonds in belly buttons, topless barmaids, strippers, bikinis or G-strings. Thank God for the snakes and the organic apples.

XII.

The following day, Caitlin and Dirk were at it again; same time, same place.

The grass was still warm; the sun had been at its best although Caitlin had suffered slightly from the scorching. Dirk noticed the overexposure when his face was almost touching hers. Like an old-fashioned pump attendant, Caitlin didn't believe in self-service customers. That's why her V-shaped fingers of one hand opened Pandora's Box while the thumb and index of the other were used to satisfy the curiosity of the well-oiled intruder.

"Don't get carried away my boy, the evening has only just begun, so I want to make the most of it," she prompted.

"I'll signal as soon as the breakers can start rolling in," she continued while her fiery eyes lit up his.

Over the years, they had learnt to synchronise their biological clocks, so when the awakened storm had finally turned into a spiralling cyclone, their bodies shook like the spindryer in their laundry before coming to rest in its eye; exhausted but temporarily satisfied. The excitement of the moment had changed her ravishing abundance of rust coloured hair into a crown of moist curls which gracefully followed the contour of her head that had now fallen back into Nature's carpet.

A refreshing stream of cool air entered the overheated crevices of their fleshy display.

"Guess what I am thinking of," she said out of the blue.

"How would I know," was the curt reply of someone who had just stepped out of bed with the wrong leg.

I was thinking of Ida and Isidor Straus again. They had decided to hear the clock chime for the last time together. I'm sure they did what we just did; instead of the cool air, they let the cool water hose them down. I couldn't possibly think of something else to do under these circumstances. Could you?

Dirk couldn't but agree.

From time to time, he was reminded of the fact that they had come into the world at the same time and then hoped that they would also leave it together. As soon as they boarded an aeroplane, that thought would always slip into his mind, although he would never disclose his secret to her, for fear that she wouldn't share the same philosophy. She would obviously not admit it, even if he decided to confide in her; it would destroy the unmarried magic.

Funnily enough, Caitlin was thinking likewise; she too would avoid mentioning it for the same reason.

It is of course totally unrealistic to entertain such a desire. One could at most hope that these secrets were identical. Only in operas do lovers die together or at will like *Madame Butterfly*.

Normally, one had better discount the occasion.

External circumstances had given Ida and Isidor the chance to choose.

"In all respect, I posthumously hope that they peaked before the water did," added Caitlin as a second thought.

"It is sad that so many women feel obliged to deny that," said Dirk.

He knew that it was Kate's favourite topic. She knew that religion had a lot to do with chastity. A woman is to bring forth children; whether or not she neglects them by putting them in front of a television set or a computer as soon as the umbilical cord is cut, is beside the point. The human seed must not be squandered.

If the Organising Source had really wanted women to be in season only once a year like all other animals, then He would have organised it. On the contrary, He gave Man the opportunity to discover that there is more to life than a Caesarean or breaking water in a taxi or in the delivery room.

That was actually the very reason why Caitlin felt rather ambivalent towards motherhood. A few weeks earlier, some colleagues and their wives had paid them a visit. Unfortunately, one of them, a woman with a host of credentials behind her name, spoiled the evening for everybody. Not only did she emphasis the fact that discussions relating to sex were uncouth in public, but she didn't shut up saying so.

It had of course turned on Kate's provocative mode. When the time was right she ventured to re-mark that Dirk only had two passions. The prude was quick to swallow the bait. "Tell me about it," she said inquisitively.

"The Titanic and eh ... my vagina to say it scientifically" answered Kate triumphantly, because that's what a professor would have said, not just a puss."

"As if there are no other important things in life," uttered the prude disgustingly from her anus shaped mouth while ignoring her husband's laughter. He told Dirk that she had been brought up in a convent with a copy of The Garden of Earthly Delights in every dormitory. The Dutch monk Hieronymus Bosch had painted the original in 1500. He used part-human, part-animal, part-vegetable forms to express his obsessive vision of worldly sin and eternal damnation. If she were caught laughing in front of these grotesque creatures, she would have had to sit on a nest of bull ants with her bare bottom. "Fortunately, the Titanic comes second," emphasised Caitlin while looking tenderly in Dirk's direction. He deduced instantly what was on the menu once they got rid of the visitors.

Back at the table, they found that the tea was cold and that the ants were in the biscuits. It only took Caitlin five minutes to come back with the replacement supper. They sipped in silence. Dirk was holding his cup with his little finger pointing upwards like the rich ladies on the New Amsterdam; it had become an almost nostalgic habit. He was thinking about how men had to be able to speak in two different tongues. Once when they were amongst themselves and one when passengers were about. Not everyone was good at it; that's why they were placed on cargo ships.

Caitlin looked with pride at the trampled grass near the hedge while the evening sun warmed her thighs. Although they had gone hell for leather, the freckles remained. Dirk put his hand on her flower covered belly button.

"Are you sure you don't want children?" he asked.

"Not when you don't want them," she replied.

They both thought that there were already more than enough children in the world. Becoming Foster Parents was an option they had considered.

Dirk knew of course that a woman's body was different from a woman's mind.

Only modern women know that dilemma. To become a spinster was a duty, not a choice. In the beginning of the twentieth Century, Catholic women kept producing an endless number, because more hands made hard work lighter. Many died, so many replacements were needed; it was a form of superannuation. Besides, the Church needed

more customers to pay for the magnificent places of worship that we now admire as tourists. Caitlin and Dirk had enough time left to think about their extensions; after all, Adam lived a hundred and thirty years before he begat a son in his likeness. Unlike Artemis, the Greek virgin goddess of the wild who turned her hunter into a stag in order to have him killed by his own hounds, Caitlin, for her own benefit as well, satisfied hers with all the goodies she could offer. So when Dirk tried to get back to his docudrama, the warm feelings still lingering down under, prevented his honest endeavour. As usual, like a second helping of a delicious dessert, his fertile fantasies took over with the speed of Pegasus. Unashamedly, he let himself be carried away by an awful looking Harpy who got hold of his noble spirits in order to replace them with more mischievous ones. The half-bird, half-maid monster reduced his size to a millionth of what he was and guided him through the body of an astonishingly beautiful woman. He soon recognised it to be that of Caitlin. The Harpy urged him to take off his diminished outfit to go for a swim in the spacious Vagina Sea. At once he was back on the New Amsterdam where he had become aware of Man's increased primeval urges. He had always been amazed by the application of "Necessity is the Mother of Invention"; like the buttons on a calculator, even the coiled cables in the forecabin had a second function.

XIII.

Dirk wanted the idea of "Noblesse Oblige" to become the theme of "Titanic 100 Years". It had to cover the actions of a whole range of different people under the same horrifying circumstances. It meant that he would not only concentrate on the famous from first class, the ones who had regularly made the front page of the daily tabloids in which they had been portrayed as part of a diminishing number of people renowned for their integrity, but also on the unblemished morals of a few poets and peasants in second, third and steerage. When passengers were warned to come on deck, it looked as if they were preparing for a fancy-dress party. Since they were in all states of dress and undress, they appeared in all sorts of outfits ranging from pyjamas, kimonos, knickers to fur coats. Some first lined up outside the purser's office to collect their valuables which the staff distributed with cool efficiency.

There was no indication of hysteria, no cries of fear; even the Titanic itself lay strangely still and motionless. Only the boilers panicked; that's why they released their pent-up steam with an infernal noise.

Dirk was thinking of the English, famous for their exemplary behaviour when they have to form a queue. The greater the chaos, the more they seemed to be in control.

Benjamin Guggenheim, despite his German sounding name, and his manservant courageously represented the Americans. They both removed their life jackets and changed into elegant evening clothes before returning to the deck. They had graciously resigned to the fact that the inevitable was nigh.

The orchestra provided the anti-climax; unlike the boilers, musicians kept playing as if nothing had happened, as if they were just warming up before an icy morning.

“Women and children first” could have meant that “First in, first served” followed, except in Ismay’s vicinity.

How many people would have made the connection between the number of fortunates each boat could accommodate and the number of unfortunates on board?

Commuters using Public Transport are not interested in how many seats there are available in a bus, let alone the number of inhabitants of their particular town or village. They are only concerned with their personal necessity.

In a bus, it is the driver’s duty to know when his vehicle is legally considered full. The bus company must make sure that the escape hatches are in working order and whether a fire can be extinguished with the prescribed equipment.

As far as passenger ships are concerned, the company is in charge of the bookings, but the captain’s duty is to know whether or not there is enough life saving capacity for everybody. To ignore it is a crime like drink-driving.

Unsinkable ships only exist in myths, legends, fairytales and in the Old Testament. Accusing passengers of being so gullible as to believe in such a unique one is not fair. As soon as they boarded the Titanic, they were in this world, but not of it; the cold rules of reality didn’t apply. When you’re on cloud nine, you’re not thinking of icebergs; they’re too far below your level. Mass psychology takes over. Many insignificant puppets have blindly executed the whims of significant and intelligent idiots trying to conquer the world as if they considered themselves immortal. It cannot be done with weapons. However, it is possible to do it with food. McDonalds has proved it.

It is not possible to beat patriotism with patriotism; the sense to belong is too strong. The above idiots have obviously never visited the ruins of an abandoned city overgrown by Nature. To make people believe that Paradise DOES exist is an art in itself. The

result always spells disaster. The Department of Education uses this self-destroying technique; it means “Play now, pay later.” To keep kids in school till the age of eighteen in order to provide employment for stagnant teachers, Primary has become Play School where parents’ offspring learn to count on finger-licking extensions and to write numbers back-to-front because we must not damage their uniqueness. As soon as they leave school and become members of the workforce, they will be reduced to a unique number. “What’s for dinner?” is a daily question. In Africa the question will be whether there IS any dinner.

Supermarkets echo with the sounds of “What do you want, hurry up.” Commercial indoctrination is working; after all, we must keep one another occupied.

Unfortunately, there is more parasitism than symbiosis. Year seven maths books will announce that the authors assume little or no previous knowledge. While Australian year eleven students paddle down the Hawkesbury River three days before the Easter holidays to learn how to become an aborigine in one week on the Minister’s orders, their South Korean counterparts sit with 50 students in one class from 7 a.m. till 11 pm., seven days a week. Guess who is filling the vacancies? There are 1.2 billion Chinese. Survival of the fittest, not playing footy is the game. Jobs for young Australians will become extinct. There’s a book entitled, “Compulsory Incompetence in Maths and English”; read it, because I wrote it!

The stuffed Hierarchy full of preservatives is betraying their compulsory customers. Compulsory incompetence, pupil-free days, mufti-days, walkathons, carnivals, excursions, thicker books filled with trivial pursuit questions and cartoons to make kids believe that learning can be fun, are the tools used to spread out the time like creamed cheese according to Parkinson’s Law: “Work expands with the time available to do it”. The act of making believe is much more powerful than that of instilling knowledge. Religion thrives on it, because it is infinitely easier to proclaim that God exists than that ships are unsinkable; only the latter advertisement can be tested.

One third of a lifetime is abused to suit the few at the top. Primitive Man died at thirty. Modern Man is still in school to unlearn what he learnt the day before. Youngsters are motivated by the slogan “Tomorrow free drinks”.

In one way or another, it all comes down to what life is all about :SURVIVAL.

Like the seven Greek boys and the seven Greek girls fed to the Minotaur, students provide the fodder for their masters, soldiers die to let the returned ones rebuild what

was destroyed, aardvarks eat white ants, white ants eat houses, builders restore them. In that light, Ismay's drive to subconsciously win the Blue Ribband provided employment for fifteen thousand yardworkers over the yet to die bodies of passengers and crew.

Most species are part of the food chain; survival instinct is stomach related.

Crime and punishment usually form the repetitive pattern during a criminal's life. In Education, they are separated. To put toddlers in front of a T.V. set and a computer is a crime; the benefits are only reaped by the companies who produce them, the psychologists, the optometrists, the physiotherapists.

Many youngsters now only have a T.V. brain, a brain used for watching and not much else. Genocide ultimately means suicide. The Titanic provides the perfect example.

Dinosaurs became extinct because of their enormous size; they ran out of digestible fuel, although it is difficult to imagine that God's Rosary contained a broken bead. Practice makes perfect. He had to still come up with the idea to create greenies for the tree-planting projects, because one arbor-day per year was not enough.

The Titanic's extinction was not really His fault. He had given Man a free will; hence the "What do you want" syndrome. Since Gods don't make mistakes, it was most likely an experiment, not as predictable as the life-cycle of a cicada.

After all, all humans are made to measure in His image. There had to be something to look forward to, something like a Messiah to do some Spring cleaning. It proved to be an adventurous project full of problems to be solved.

It made "I want to murder someone" an extremely complex matter.

He had to open up schools to train psychologists and social workers. For that to happen, He first needed Mr. and Mrs. Dogood and Mr. and Mrs. Knowall to indoctrinate them. They had to find out that the slaying hand had its origins in the merging of an alcoholic father and a drug addicted prostitute, because Man himself is faultless. The above aberrations are only variations in personality, that's why Noah made sure he had one of each.

In the end, He realised that he needed something like an Original Sin - device; that's where the Bilpin apples came in.

Man became too big for His boots, no matter how large the size. He never learnt from the past either. Regardless of the number of watertight compartments, no ship is unsinkable.

On Friday, 7th May 1915, Cunard's pride Lusitania sank within 18 minutes after being hit by one single German torpedo, despite her 175 compartments and her cellular double bottom. More than 1200 people drowned.

Building ships that would dwarf anything else yet designed, creating cities to hold Olympic Games proves that futility is already in the foetus. No matter how small the fractions used, only Man's brain is superior, not his physical performance, although it is used to mesmerise the crowds like the Romans did. If God had wanted Man to become faster, He would have turned him into a rabbit. If God had wanted Man to jump higher, He would have turned him into a flea. If God had wanted Man to cross the oceans without refuelling, He would have turned him into a bird. Scientists are Man's pilots to explore human limits. Man himself is oblivious of the possibilities. In a scientific eye, ordinary people behave like a little wind-up toy getting stuck in a corner wasting its energy. They die as unsatisfied as a Sultan's eunuch. In the days of the Titanic, there was no Department of Consumer Affairs. If there had been one, and tickets would have carried the warning that no ship was unsinkable, it would have been a waste of time like telling smokers that their addiction is a health hazard and might cause lung cancer. The mere picture of the eighth wonder of the world would have dispelled any fear; an all embalming euphoria would have caused hopefuls to only think in terms of living happily ever after, but excluding "Until death do us part".

XIV.

If people had been in a Bishop's burning basilica during Mass, they would have abandoned the Lord. The Congregation wouldn't have patiently formed a queue the English way. Those faithfuls participating in the Holy Communion would have run down the aisle in reverse. Being the rich descendants from the Ancient Israelites, Ida and Isidor were waiting in their imaginary synagogue until the walls came tumbling down.

During their business years, they hadn't sat down saying, "See what happens."

Like Ismay, they had made it happen. Now, they let it happen for the first and the last time in their lives.

They soon realised that this human marvel couldn't possibly compete with the wooden Ark created by their Hebrew God. Although there were no icebergs, it did withstand the great Flood.

Hitler had not been as reverend when he was confronted with the counterpart of the Nordic Gods. When he looked in disdain at a simple Viking ship on display in an Oslo museum, the curator risked his neck by cautiously reminding the Führer that its apparent simplicity was quite deceiving and that it had been capable of reaching England whereas frenzied German soldiers got no further than singing, “Und wir fahren GEGEN Engeland.” (We are sailing TOWARDS England.)

The Strauss couple had always been in the limelight. They had lived at a time during which religious morals were faithfully observed. They wanted the world to know that the looming heavenly voyage wouldn't alter their Yiddish integrity.

Their worldly exit would be a royal one. Hitler and Eva Braun's departure was more biblical; their remnants became like dust under a seagrass matting.

“If I had been Isidor, I would have positioned myself a big closer to Ismay,” said Dirk.

“Then you would also have been a living coward rather than a perished hero,” ventured Caitlin with a smile.

“You say it as if you wouldn't have been ashamed at all for the rest of your life if I had done so,” continued Dirk.

“Not at all; if we had been on board, I would have given you one of my dresses, a stuffed bra and a wig to make you look like Marilyn Monroe.”

“That has actually happened,” cackled Dirk like a chicken that managed to finally squeeze out an oversized egg with two yolks.

“Man only wants to see himself as a perfect, selfrighteous being of impeccable integrity. It is his business card, his front door and his façade.

He ignores his darker sides; he doesn't want to know them. Worse; he hasn't got them. When parents are asked to fill out a questionnaire about the number of hours their children watch T.V., answers are always blatant lies.

Perhaps his darker side known to all might reveal itself to him as well just before his death. Strangely enough to humans, but not to the Organising Source, that very revelation might well activate the trigger to set him free. After all, since God created him in His image, He will let him go as such, unburdened by his worldly imperfections. The serene look on his otherwise motionless dead face would be the outward manifestation, much like the green departure flash emitted by the sun a split-second before disappearing below the horizon.”

Only omni-impotent or self-indulgent, religious fanatics with dictatorial streaks, but incapable of handling a sword could have come up with something more destructive.

It's quite obvious that only a self-proclaimed Holiness and followers could invent places like Purgatory and Hell. Their artistic supporters more than satisfactorily created the visual, because a picture speaks a thousand words.

Since God is portrayed as universal goodness, He wouldn't know what punishment was. The very fact that they replaced the Gods and Goddesses of the Greeks and the Romans is not only a sign of male chauvinism, but it became easier to manipulate the masses in the name of one single Deity. It was the forerunner of the new G.S.T. system fraught with tax-file numbers and A.B.N.s to try and control the ordinary bloke, not the pricks at the top.

Since most humans are ugly, they had to cover themselves with something more substantial than the outfits they used to wear in Paradise. Only children are unpretentious.

Only ripening females and weathered workers are worth a drawing or a sculpture. Whereas Red Indians and soldiers dressed themselves in awesome outfits, holy men used stolen Inca gold, tax-deductible splendour and incense to tame the flock of fearing faithfuls.

Scare tactics create power, but it is always as shortlived as an expensive crackernight or the opening of the Australian Olympics.

Curiously enough the belief in something unbelievable has created many more works of art, employment and death than reality has; the latter has only built high-rise monstrosities, kit-houses, multiple-choice, ready in a week, air-conditioned, self-vacuuming, dehumanised, dishwasher-filled, computerised replicas of artificially contrived pictures in Vogue magazine, and fibro Housing Commission hovels.

If we grieve over the unfortunates lost at sea, we might as well continuously wear black armbands in memory of those who croak in religious battles. Cannibals were much more merciful; they didn't leave the chops to the visiting vultures."

Suddenly, Caitlin abruptly interrupted his philosophical train of thought.

As if probing deeper into the field of possible answers to the question she was about to ask, she had closed her eyes.

"How on earth is it possible that most Titanic authors, after correcting and copying the many well-known factual details, manage to turn such a huge tragedy into an ever growing myth?"

"Because the Titanic will keep providing food for the thoughts of a psychologist."

"How's that?"

“Take for instance the mother who lost her husband, but survived with all her children bar one.”

Think about all those men who had to cope with the fact that they were actually not supposed to be saved.

Ismay’s image went down as well as that of so many others. Ismay was left with his darker side; he lived like a hermit. Nobody in his vicinity was allowed to mention any word beginning with a capital T.

The remaining years of his life would have undoubtedly been more bearable if he had called himself a bastard; loud and clear for the whole world to hear.

Instead, he kept denying to himself that he was. His troubled existence was the result suppressing the images of the disaster he had caused.

Captain Smith continued his career as a bronze statue in his native village.

Initially, he attracted the respectful and pitied attention of passers-by.

On sunny days, some parents explained to their children who this motionless man was; how a nasty paddlepop as huge as the Big Ben had cut holes in his ship to cause it to sink like a stone thrown into their fishpond; not that he went too fast.

Even the sun reminded them of his once brilliant past.

On rainy days however, his watery appearance symbolised well his lonely aquatic descent while the brollied, scurrying inhabitants unwillingly re-enacted the closing scene on the boatdeck.

In this postmortem existence, he eventually became green with envy.

Unlike Atlas proudly carrying the world, his boss Ismay, who was still alive although not well, had made him stand here bedecked with birdshit, the reincarnation of his guilt.

“And what about the wife and the mistress of Ben Guggenheim; weren’t they saved?” asked Caitlin.

“Yes and no,” said Dirk.

“We already know that it becomes more and more difficult to separate fact from fiction.

Some sources mention the fact that his wife appeared on the passenger list, but that she only accompanied her husband during the trip from Southampton to Cherbourg.

Leontine Aumont, his French mistress was saved and welcomed in New York by her and their twelve-year old daughter Peggy.

The two women embraced each other with squeezed breasts and a waterfall of tears before strolling arm-in-arm to the waiting taxi.

Ben's wife knew that her husband had several mistresses. Peggy, in her Memoirs, tells us that her parents used to go for a walk in the Bois de Boulogne, a famous park in Paris. One morning, Mrs. Guggenheim spotted the marchioness who was known to be one of her accepted rivals. The Marquise was exquisitely dressed in a lambskin outfit. When she queried him why he had given her such an expensive gift, he apologised and handed her the money to purchase the same.

She didn't of course give two hoots about the amount of money spent because she was a very wealthy woman herself. It was more the fact that he had obviously valued his mistress a bit higher than herself. She would never do the same to him.

"Jealousy can be compensated by a difference in prestige, but definitely not by a loss of it," remarked Kate with a challenging smile.

Peggy had inherited a huge fortune. Even though Ben hadn't been actively involved in the business of his father and brothers any longer, he was assured of his own inheritance as well as of the dividend on his shares.

She undoubtedly also received a substantial amount when her mother died.

Although she was an extravagant woman, Peggy spent her money wisely by acquiring world famous works of art for her "Collezione".

Her uncle Solomon, who was ostracised by the rest of the family, opened the Guggenheim Museum of Modern Art in New York; Peggy was the one who did the buying. In the first place, she collected paintings and sculptures for herself, for her luxurious mansion and garden in Venice. Picassos, Mondriaans, you name it, she bought it.

The works created by one of her spouses, Max Ernst, were of course gifts.

Peggy also collected lovers; in that respect, she was just like her father and most probably like her mother as well.

Since time immemorial, women have put their busty bodies in the balance.

Cleo Patra, meaning naughty Patra, provides a good example, at least if one believes the stories. They don't all get away with murder. Mata Hari, a Dutch dancer in France, was executed as a German spy during World War 1.

Whatever Peggy provided, the value of their output probably far outweighed her input.

She had always wanted to become an artist herself, but she missed the talent; it cannot be bought.

However, she was quite capable of discovering the artistic - as well as the erotic expertise of many a young painter or sculptor."

“You’re drifting away from the subject, my boy. We’ve already given Ben a place of honour in our obituary; Peggy distracts too much,” said Kate, hoping that Dirk would get the message.

Dirk knew exactly what she was getting at and said, “As long as you keep wearing that see-through, flowery dress of yours, YOU could never distract ME too much; there’s enough time left to come back to the story. However, I desperately need a little snooze first.” They often, like now, enjoyed a working holiday on a cargo ship. Caitlin had pleaded with Dirk to finally buy himself a decent pair of shoes; after all, he was still an officer. When he had done so, she didn’t take any notice. For the first time in his life, he was annoyed with her, so he decided to take off everything except his shoes. Since she had already hopped into bed, he asked her, “Don’t you see anything?” She looked and answered, “No, not immediately except I see something hanging.” “What is it pointing at?” he asked, a bit frustratedly. “Why, to your shoes, of course, but I wished you had bought a new cap as well.”

XV

Some time later, Caitlin heard Dirk walk to and fro on the bridge; it was a common way of killing time, looking out and exercising the legs at the same time.

She would join him during the remaining two hours until the First Mate took over. She had set the alarm clock for 1 a.m. because she wanted to first update her glossary of typical words and expressions used at sea; not only the sexual connotations, but also the names and nicknames of people and parts.

Like an auto-electrician, Marconi operators were known as “Sparkies”; only a self-explanatory name if one thinks of the old-fashioned, hand-operated switch for transmitting Morse code.

The compass wrench was an imaginary tool to make a fool of a new apprentice. The officer in charge would send him down to the engine room to get it. The engineer would then give him a 25kg wrench used to turn the nuts for connecting engine bolts. The poor fellow would wriggle his way up the oily ladders on his way back to the bridge where he would be met with a symphony of laughs.

The E for Equator was more than just that. It meant that gullible passengers would be summoned to the bridge to actually see it when the ship was getting near.

Little did they know that they were looking at a thin thread put inside the telescope. The H for Horny was quite popular.

One entry was Dirk's own. He had made one trip on a cargo ship which also carried a few passengers. One of them, a rather plain looking young woman was on her way to Baltimore to get married. As it so happened, her cabin was next to Dirk's.

As the journey proceeded, she became more and more beautiful and consequently more and more desirable. Contact was almost impossible, because she mainly kept to herself; a greeting would never be more than a shallow smile.

She had absolutely no idea what went on in Dirk's uniform and possibly that of others as well.

Unfortunately, Dirk had another set back. When the seamstress had asked him which side he carried, he didn't want to let her know that he was still wet behind the ears, so he confidently answered, "In the middle, madam."

In the pre-pornography days, men had the choice between nothing and the real thing.

One day, he had turned off the light to have a nap before going on duty.

Strangely enough, a thin beam of light remained; it filtered through an opening around the pipe that obviously connected his and her wash basin. His heart worked overtime.

Within seconds, he was down on his knees to investigate his chances.

With the agility of a yogi, but not his tranquillity, he experienced a mystical union of the self with the Supreme Being, which in this case was the poor passenger's open wishing well, because she stood with only one leg on the floor; the other one was in the basin. He did what came naturally.

Two a.m. Caitlin closed her book and decided to put on the only dress she had; it was Dirk's favourite because it made her body extremely accessible.

It was new moon so the helmsman could only guess what was happening. Keeping course while the officer had intercourse was of course worse than being flogged or keelhailed.

Not every man is a satyr like Dirk.

Not every woman is as hyper-hot as Caitlin. A continuously stroking hand during normal business hours is exasperating; it would wear out a man's weapon; to sharpen it with modern means is as decadent as buggery, although it fits in a world where a remote control can opener would be the ultimate.

It could well be that a fertile mind automatically led to an equally fertile body.

Highly technical people who could talk for hours on end about each individual restored part of their eighty-year old tractor during a wake while standing with a keep-cool covered tinny under the dead eucalypt of a deceased estate, would, most probably, only be reminded of their maleness when their biological thermostat had activated their erectile tool.

Women seem to often forget or ignore the fact that their friend, partner, boss or hubby is part of the animal world, programmed to produce; the Original Sin is a human invention. Normal commercialism certainly didn't invent it; only religion did because it means instilling fear of the unknown. The awesome outfits of the Godfathers are part of the indoctrination process. Jesus himself only wore simple garments. He is like the centaur in Greek Mythology. He is one of a race of creatures with the head, arms and torso of a man, and the lower body and legs of a stallion. Like the Bible, mythological stories represent reality in disguise; they need a good interpreter. However, when some guru says that he knows, it means that he doesn't. Forgetful or ignorant women should come to terms with that, although it is of course easier said than done. Advice is not heeded when most needed. Reading "Woman's Weekly" stories is an addiction, not a cure. It's not always the body that decides; the mind is programmed with natural as well as artificial brakes. If the top-part of her centaur is a good and caring friend, regularly working his eight-hour shift, she has won the Melbourne Cup. If she denies him a naughty because he hasn't mowed the lawn or wants new furniture on her fortieth birthday, she has turned herself into a domestic prostitute. To say that her he-it is only interested in her body, is her own fault which commenced when she was still in High School, falling asleep during the Biology lesson. When she marries him because he is a jolly drinker, but then wants to stop his habit to save up a deposit with the money otherwise spent, it's too late. After the divorce, she will most probably meet another drinker who winds up in a wheelchair because of failing legs or kidneys, going to St. Vincent de Paul for a hand-out.

XVI

On this particular trip, Caitlin was the only woman on board.

In Dirk's eyes and most probably in those of the other 30 crewmembers, she had at once become the personification of all the women in the world, complete with their enormous

range of wriggling bottoms and bosoms, of hair, mohair or no hair, of legs and lips, of hallowed hollows and hips.

However, it was only in Dirk's mind that he was adulterous. Caitlin used to say that he was allowed to scrutinise as many menus as he wanted, as long as he had dinner at home. Cities abound with sexual appetisers so it was not such an unreasonable request.

It made it a bit hard for the crew, however; literally and figuratively.

Head and hand would no doubt combine to at least get something out of it.

The peculiar thing was that Kate never discussed what went on in her head, although, once in a while, she would draw on it in order to produce a trump card to win the game. One day, a couple of sailors were mopping the wooden deck below the bridge.

Dirk overheard one of them saying, "Guess what I saw yesterday: Cuntlin was sunbathing wif nuffink on. You should have seen the red curly shag on her box!"

"Fair dinkum; did you really see that?" asked his mate excitedly.

"Of course I did; do you think that I would tell fairytales?" boasted the first.

When Dirk asked her later if she had indeed been sunbaking in the nude, she burst out laughing. "No way, although I wish I could, but that is definitely one thing I must NOT do! I wore my tennis shorts with a long sleeved top. His mop and my red hair must have given free rein to his imagination."

That night, Dirk was leaning on the teak railing of the starboard wing, close to the green velvet lined box with the binoculars, ready for use.

Although there was nothing in sight, vigilance had to be observed at all times, especially in areas where local fishermen would operate and only show, at the last minute, accompanied by panicking voices, a flickering light way down the darkness.

If their nets became tangled up in the propeller, havoc would be the result.

When the hallucinating sailor brought him a cup of coffee, Dirk immediately switched from the fishermen to the red, curly shag on the box.

There was hardly a day without enjoying her seaweed and the Delta works behind it.

She would often squat just above his face in order to enable him to take in, via his five senses, everything she had to offer including the special sound effects in her sexual corridor.

Since Kate was insatiable, Dirk had to be as vigilant as on the bridge.

Would she still appeal to the wishful, male imagination?

At first, he was going to ask HER instead of fantasising himself; after all, she had a diploma in these matters.

However, it didn't take him long to come up with the obvious answer himself.

If someone was able to see a pussy covered with tobacco instead of tennis shorts, it would be no different from seeing a non-existing face in the moon or in the clouds.

Beauty and excitement are in the eyes and the body of the beholder; a cardboard box wouldn't interfere with it. Like a bikini, it might actually increase the tension, although the bikini would make the transition infinitely easier.

There is a similarity between God and a bikini; they both represent something desirable, but invisible. They both represent heaven, although the bikini does it with more certainty. Admittedly, trying to find God is like looking for a needle in a haystack, but no spacecraft piercing through the heavens has ever bumped into HIM.

Caitlin was convinced that, each night, at least five men would make love to her in their post-pubertal period. They would feel their way with their fast food fingers through her pubes in search for her private entrance. They would enter without the consent of the owner in order to indulge in a three-course meal and a mintie with Turkish coffee to come back to Earth. She got the idea that it was actually her duty to provide this remote control service. It wouldn't be too difficult, of course. Any professional prostitute of average ability would even be able to entertain the whole crew without getting excited herself. It would therefore be quite easy to keep five going from a distance. Although Dirk thought that he was in the race with two performances per day, Kate often managed to sneak in a private undress-rehearsal when Dirk was out of the way, because it would certainly have upset his gold medal ego. During her latest fantasy, she would let every single crew member march past her nakedness in order to give her the royal salute with his hastily erected sub-abdominal bayonet. Her Majesty would spend time to take each one between her thumb and index finger in order to test its hardness. One day, she found out that a young sailor, by way of a joke, had let his mates draw numbers that would indicate when it would be their turn with Cuntlin. When it was suggested that their very unpopular captain would be last, a raucous laughter had apparently broken loose. She didn't discuss the incident with Dirk but decided to keep herself invisible for a while.

XVII

RAISE THE TITANIC was the title of Clive Cussler's bestseller.

The poster announcing the film by that name could best be compared with a heartrending cry.

At first, even God was convinced that she was unsinkable.

Then, nobody on Earth could reach her.

Now, you can witness her salvage.

Like any other film, this one had to also mix fact and fiction. People are drowning in reality; they're sick of it despite their time-saving gadgets and their fictional standard of living. Entertainment is the only Saviour left to them because they've thrown everything else overboard.

The film did contribute its share to the legend. The mock-up tallied with the general belief that the Titanic rested in one piece on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean.

Expectation is the Father of disappointment. That's why they even brought her to the surface with three of the gigantic funnels still in place, because the Titanic without they wouldn't have been the Titanic. People want to see, if not all, at least part of the picture they remembered. That's why, at present, in order to update their status, The Netherlands are desperately trying to get rid of their stereotype clog-and-tulip image.

In the meantime, experts got a more up-to-date picture. Apart from the Lusitania which sank within sight of the Irish coast in 1915, the Titanic's sistership, the Britannic, either ran into a minefield or was torpedoed in the Aegean Sea during the same war.

It was not until half a century later that she was discovered by the famous French diver, Jacques Cousteau. The Britannic lay on her side without any funnels, one hundred metres below the surface; she never became a legend, that's why she stayed where she was.

Since the necessary exhaust pipes were too small to give the big ocean liners their majestic look, they were hidden in the much larger, relatively weak show funnels.

After twenty-five years of reliable service, the other sistership, the Olympic, finished up in the wrecking yard where she was completely dismantled.

A wealthy couple purchased all the fancy woodwork for their luxurious mansion in London.

Books about the Titanic keep coming. The television stations only provide attention seeking coverage in order to raise the level of public consciousness.

An expert in statistics once figured that the name Titanic was more popular than those of Shell or Heinz Tomato Ketchup.

XVIII

When they both turned fifty, Dirk and Caitlin had been together for more than twenty years; still engaged to be married.

They got sidetracked when Man stepped onto the Moon for the first time; at least that's what they think.

They were convinced that the pictures of Earth sent back from its satellite would cause people to form a new image in their minds of that relatively little ball on the T.V. screen, especially because of the fact that it carried five thousand million human creatures. They didn't. Brainwashed by commercial conmen, they kept chasing their unreachable tail in the illusive hope to meet the new Messiah who would solve all their earthly problems. They forgot that life wasn't meant to be easy, and that one has to simply work up a sweat to get by. Only the dead are without problems. Recurring problems are a sign of life; one has to therefore learn to accept them and to be aware of Murphy's Law, but realising that Murphy was in fact an optimist.

Dirk and Caitlin instantly became interested in space travel as well.

In combining the past and the future, they enjoyed the present.

They made regular trips to Cape Kennedy and Houston Mission Control. If they wanted to pamper themselves a bit, they would fly in a Concorde which reached speeds of up to Mach 2, twice the speed of sound, which meant that there was a deadly silence in the aircraft owing to the fact that they flew ahead of the sound of their own jets.

Then came the famous Apollo flights. Number 13 became a tragedy and could possibly outdo the myth surrounding the Titanic. Superstitious people were convinced that there should never have been a number thirteen. However, the facts showed again that all the ingredients for the disaster recipe were present: recklessness, pride, pettiness, stupidity, failure and survival.

At three quarters of the way, the mothership with the three men had to let go of the moonlanding buggy attached to its nose in order to let it proceed on its own and then circle around the moon to give it enough speed to let it come back to Earth.

They could only afford to give it a small boost because the rest of the available energy stored in the batteries was needed for landing.

The return trip became a nightmare with necessity again the mother of invention.

As soon as they had managed to get Mother Earth in their viewfinder, the men transferred to the buggy's own nosecone, just in time to avoid being burnt to death or being sent into space to orbit around the sun forever and ever.

Mission Control needed three minutes to let everything run to schedule. After four and a half, there was still no sign of life. Hundreds of Houston men and women were already shedding their tears in mourning until, suddenly, the nosecone, hanging from three parachutes, appeared triumphantly on their T.V. screens. The same tears became tears of joy. All Americans witnessed this unique moment. The women and the children of the crew members were ecstatic.

XIX

When Dirk and Caitlin finally saw the Titanic on their own screen at home, they too got tears in their eyes, but for different reasons; not only during the euphoria of finding it, but more so because of the fact that the world's greatest Ocean Liner had been reduced to a rusty scrapheap.

Dr. Bob Ballard - geologist and leader of the American expedition team - had used the American's advanced video search system to hunt for the Titanic's debris field as well as for the wreck itself.

At first, the strobe lights and the sensitive video cameras captured one of the giant boilers, but soon after, also the tangled pieces of steel plates, railings and portholes, about thirteen nautical miles East of the Titanic's last reported position.

At that moment, all wars and natural catastrophes in progress temporarily lost their immediate attention.

At a ripe old age, infant survivors could only convey what their mothers had told them.

Whatever story people had in their minds, it turned at once into something that actually went beyond reality; it became more realistic than real, because only now did it sink in that the disaster had indeed happened.

Right there, in the sand of the television screen, she was resting, although not in one piece any longer. There were actually three main pieces: the bow, the stern and a third piece. The evidence of the iceberg's damage however, remained a mystery for the time being because the section involved was buried under 45 feet of mud. It was not until 1996 that it was solved.

Surrounding the main pieces were more than 400 silent witnesses, ranging from winches, deckchairs, the compass, beacons, megaphone to personal belongings as small as a ring.

Since quite a number of toilet units had to still be installed, there was actually one standing amongst the debris. To most viewers, it represented the connection with real people that eventually would have used it.

All in all, the scene looked like a mega garage sale spread out over an area as large as four soccer fields. Those who drowned were pulverised to particles beyond recognition due to the enormous pressure. The bow looked like a huge Christmas cake, enough to give a piece to all the poor children in Africa. The artist pastry cook had made it complete with chains and hanging anchors, railings, spare anchor, the foremast lying down on the wheelhouse, with the now empty crow's nest halfway. But the young couples were gone. Ballard's pictures were used to make a production; it was so authentic looking that one could say that it gave birth to its own original. New stories emerged. On the one hand those in the National Geographic magazine with its sublime photography, and the ones written by Mr. and Mrs. Perfect because they indulged in quoting absurd details such as the number of buttons on uniforms. On the other hand, as could be expected, the far fetched fantasies written by clever fiction writers and fake Titanic raisers.

XX

At once, Dirk and Caitlin went into the opposite direction. They left the moon because it was new anyway - nothing to see - and plunged into the depths of the Atlantic with Bob Ballard when he was in the process of salvaging the huge safe of the Titanic which, if one believed the persistent legends, contained a hoard of gold and treasure.

The opening of it had to be like the night of handing out Oscars, football trophies and High School Certificates; the normal bullshit people fall for. The artificial atmosphere created by a couple of shiny men and half-naked women gets them out of their microwave way of life; with a glass of champagne, it will temporarily charge their flat battery.

So Ballard knew that people needed to be warmed up first. He knew that they didn't want the crude "You want a fuck" approach of many a back-to-front capped youth, the stereotype kid defined by an eighty-year old lady while he passed by her window. When

her ninety-year old husband asked her whether their neighbour's boy was doing his H.S.C., she answered, "Certainly not, he can't even spell it. The other day I asked him what half two was, guess what he said?"

"Stuffed if I know!"

The whole world had to witness the opening on their screens. Ballard wanted to create a World Cup Final delirium, a "Santa Claus is coming" expectation.

In order to finance new scientific expeditions, scientists had learnt to present an occasion like this as theatre. "Do you think there's much money in it?" asked Caitlin. "Of course not; it's going to be like the magician's rabbit and the empty hat. Like the elation and the disappointment when the game is over. Like the short-lived excitement of opening Christmas presents because the bedrooms of most kids are already filled with the same rubbish anyway; only the size and the colour might be different. Five minutes later they're back on their old, rusty bikes or their beloved skateboards. No safe is watertight. Apart from that, the rich didn't walk around with a pocket full of loose coins; their money was not even on board. The Titanic was not like the Armada. The television show will be like a blown-up balloon attacked with a pin." "Television producers still have their show." "Yes, but people are suckers for disappointment; they will still anxiously wait for the next flop; they've got nothing else but their fake furniture; anything to distract them will do." When the great day came to finally open the safe, it was indeed like the balloon.

XXI

Robert Ballard's book "The Discovery of the Titanic" became of course a bestseller. It was a purely technical account of everything leading up to that historical moment, but written in plain American English with explanatory notes for the layman.

He added new facts to the cause of the sinking. He explained and showed for instance why and where the ship had broken up.

One may wonder why the Titanic keeps attracting the attention of millions of people around the world whereas thousands of others also make the journey to the bottom of the seas and the oceans. What they missed was the story that travelled by word of mouth; that's why they will rest and rot obliviously until they take on, like a chameleon, the appearance of their surroundings.

Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount and a number of subproducers invested millions in the film which only needed to be called “Titanic”, because that said it all.

James Cameron’s script looked promising. The leading role of the young and fictional Rose de Witt Bukater was played by Kate Winslet. A much older actress was used to portray Rose looking back so many years later.

The ship’s replica was nine tenths of her real size.

The initial estimated budget had to be doubled as time went on; not an unusual phenomenon. The final cost of the Sydney Opera House far exceeded the original figure. When the producers threatened to cut off the monetary supply., Cameron forfeited his own remuneration; not until they would break even, would he receive his first dollar.

Dirk and Caitlin managed to get in touch with him with the idea to write the television documentaries for seven European countries. During the weeks that followed, they were present during the filming and collected a wealth of material to bring back with them.

“A product has to be established before it is actually on the market,” Cameron had told them. “In this case, it already was more than eighty years ago,” added Kate in her unmistakable mothertongue.

After their first T.V. appearance in Holland, they got into some strife with a Dutchman by the name of Edward P.de Groot who was rightly considered to be the best Titanic expert in the country.

When de Groot came up with a seemingly endless list of incongruous elements in Cameron’s Hollywood-version, they wrote:

Dear Sir,

Re: Titanic, the film

We have always admired your renowned Titanical knowledge. However, we were both surprised as well as extremely disappointed to find that you were determined to ram it down the throat of your audience during a recent appearance on T.V.

You would never have felt that unsolicited need if you hadn’t witnessed our program about the film, not the ship by that name.

You have obviously no idea that the producer of such a mega project is only interested in establishing a visual impact, not a structural one. We could bluntly state that whatever you saw on the set was as fake as the painted forests in a Robin Hood play.

It is extremely silly to think that the filmmakers would have employed 15,000 yard workers to make an exact replica first; they were not interested in starting up a new shipping company. We have enough knowledge of ships to realise that the set as we experienced it can never replace reality; it can at most represent it; filmmakers are not interested in anything else.

It is first and foremost used as a setting for the human tragedy to unfold. Only in the final stage does it play its own part so to speak. What you saw going down was definitely not something that could have sailed the Atlantic.

Films and plays use mockups; isn't that enough to gag your arguments?

Don't think for a moment that we weren't shocked ourselves when we noticed the smooth hull as if it had just left the beauty salon instead of the Harland and Wolff shipyard. More than three million steel rivets were used to hold the two thousand one-inch-thick steel plates together; we saw none of these. The bridge was made of plywood instead of teak. The plastic propellers were coated to make them look like cast steel and bronze.

We certainly missed the cold and the wind; no icemaking machine and vacuum cleaner could have possibly been able to provide it.

We could find fault with much more, but what's the point?

Music critics will hardly ever enjoy a magnificent performance of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, because they're always listening for that missing note.

A film is not a documentary. What you will see is an awesome spectacle, because that's what people want; they need to be entertained. When the giant lifts her stern and reaches a near vertical position, it's science fiction based on real facts, and when the enormous crowd of helpless people are being swept across the decks like peanuts down the chute in a peanut butter factory, the minds of the audience are being swept into another dimension with cries of, "Oh, my God!"

Nobody will check the passenger list to see whether Rose was actually on it. Only a few insiders might find that her heroic swimming marathon in that aquatic labyrinth was a bit far-fetched.

You have to also understand that Cameron could never have presented the real love story of two great-grandparents when they were only in their twenties. Their young descendants would have wanted to cut his throat for that, because, in their minds, their forebears just got married and made children with the lights turned off.

The huge fly in the male pyjama catered for an easy exit in the dark; the female nightgown only needed to be lifted a bit to let the poke find its way; lovemaking is a modern activity, they think.

So far, we have let ourselves go down with your sinking ship.

Fortunately, we possess enough buoyancy to tell you that the film has come up with the undeniable truth that the Titanic did exist and that she indeed sank to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean after hitting an iceberg. What once started as raw reality will branch out into a myriad of separate legends with a life of their own, because each narrator will slightly change the one he heard. The Titanic legends will follow the same path as the Odyssey, Atlantis or the Trojan Horse.

Anyone who goes down with Ballard to visit the wreck of the Titanic will make the connection with Rose de Witt Bukater despite the fact that she never existed. The Titanic story could have been told in 2200 different ways, because that was the number of people on board: 2247 to be precise because we did read your book.

We are aware of the fact that you revised it after Ballard had written his; it resulted in an increase in royalties. This time we advise you to include an expensive epilogue as well; it will again prove to be a profitable move, especially when we consider the expected number of Titanic viewers.

Thank you for your attention to this matter,

Within a few months, James Cameron's "Titanic" reached the break-even point and received eleven Oscars. Dirk and his "fiancée" were amongst the special guests invited to see its premiere in Amsterdam. They were already in their sixties then; two grey doves with suntanned beaks, still able to fly into the heavens to reach the stars. The Director of the Maritime Museum presented them with the Dutch equivalent of the O.B.E. Since Her Majesty's collection is open-ended, she had been pleased to sacrifice one. Lo and Behold! Edward de Groot was one of the first to congratulate them; he actually promised to take up the challenge to revise his book as suggested. In his new version, even Rose would become a reality. For the first time, Dirk and Kate saw the entire film; before that they had only seen isolated segments. It demonstrated once again the idea of holism, the philosophy that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts; that a newly erected kithome is more than what was delivered on the vacant block of land.

XXII

Back in their “House by the Hedge” as it showed on their business cards and letterheads, they were reminiscing in their queen-size pre-nuptial bed.

Dirk had pinned his O.B.E. onto his nocturnal outfit, near the entrance of its king-size fly. His organ lay temporarily dormant underneath. Caitlin was quite happy to let him indulge in his juvenile fantasies. Not only did she know exactly where he was going to put hers, she actually felt that it could have been the only place, because that’s where their mutual career had started.

With their heads on the one pillow, they reviewed Cameron’s creation. They came to the conclusion that the various scenes were indeed masterpieces.

The old Rose with her goldfish was touching, especially when she appeared in her wheelchair on the Atlantis, accompanied by a crew member carrying its bowl.

“And what about that vintage car being hoisted aboard while the passengers embarked at Southampton?”

“That wasn’t a vintage car, you twit; that was a brand new Renault. You obviously alighted from your time-machine for a moment. No doubt you guys were also hanging over the railing to see what kind of females were coming up the gangway. I bet you undressed me as well.”

“I remember it clearly,” said Dirk while he let his free hand run through her grey hair. If we had seen such a beautiful limousine hang in the slings...”

“Then what?”

“Don’t you think that we would also have tried to find our way into the cargo hold, the first time we met?”

“Come on, you act as if it wasn’t romantic enough in your cabin at the time. I had to hide in it practically the whole day after the night before. At one stage, I had to even duck under the desk when a sailor came in with a cup of tea to wake you up. Worse; when I thought that the coast was clear, I still managed to practically walk straight into the arms of the Captain and the Chief Engineer.”

“Ha-ha, that heralded the end of my career with the Holland-America Line.”

“Do you regret it?”

“Don’t be silly; why ask a question to which you already know the answer? Do you know what else was outstanding?”

“I’m listening!”

“First when Rose’s new lover stops her from jumping overboard halfway through the film, and then, near the end, when he commands her to actually do it.”

“Yes, quite moving, but unrealistic nevertheless unless you are an Inuid doing it from a kayak.”

“A what?”

“An Eskimo, but we’re not allowed to say that anymore, because it apparently means blubber-eater, and that is considered derogatory by Mr. & Mrs. Perfect.”

“So now they go hungry?”

“Shut up, it’s not funny!”

“You must remember that the temperature was near zero and that the ship’s speed was about 22 knots; enough to let their frozen ears blow off their heads.”

“Besides, her flimsy dress was certainly not suitable to go ice-skating.”

“Not to forget that the poor boy’s telescopic implement would also have been rendered useless under those circumstances,” said Dirk from experience.

She cuddled up a bit closer to Dirk while putting her hand on his O.B.E.; henceforth the new name for his still very productive penis.

“I think too that Rose and her lover were out of proportion.”

“Unavoidable,” said Dirk, “The lovenscene, not the bow was important. Reality could never have conveyed the message. Noah could never have built a ship big enough to serve the purpose. In filming, one has to manipulate size; the cameramen had no other choice but to exaggerate. Even at .9 the real size, people were relatively too big.”

As a matter of fact, there was a much smaller bow standing in the yard.

“You start sounding a bit like Edward de Groot,” whispered Kate in Dirk’s ear.

“You’re right; that’s what happens when rational thinking overtakes the first, harmlessly sweet, impulsive impressions. As soon as you finish making love, you’re either hungry or think how little money is left in the bank. A fairytale is only real when you’re young. Initially, Santa Claus gives you presents; eventually you have to buy them yourself.”

“But I still love Jack and the Beanstalk,” joked Kate while admiring his O.B.E. when it suddenly jumped to attention. “Are you trying to impress me?”

“No, not after so many years but, funnily enough, I was actually thinking about the fact that filmmakers are impressionists, not realists.”

“So, subconsciously, you wanted to literally point out to me that you are both,” trumped Caitlin. “A bit like Ben Guggenheim when he got all dressed up to meet the Lord.”

“Thanks, but I still can’t help feeling that Cameron should have simulated a bit of wind. Rose should have at least been given a hairblower.”

“Do you think that Captain Smith really wore all those medals on his chest?”

“Of course; aren’t we wearing ours right now? These thin and narrow ones made of cloth hadn’t been invented yet; nowadays, all generals in Third World countries are bedecked with them. Captain Smith was almost topheavy; with each move he made, his coins would sound like windchimes.”

“You seemed to be obsessed with wind.”

“Yes, I know; it all started with Sir Francis Drake and Queen Elizabeth I when they visited the Tower of London.”

“Was there anything impressive and realistic in the film?”

“Absolutely; I could never compete with that: The ploughing pistons, the boilers, the stokers, the engine room. Powerful poetry and real romance.”
“But I could still pretend to be Rose in the Renault,” invited Kate.

Within seconds, Dirk was already sucking her hardened dummies.

XXIII

TITANIC ONE HUNDRED YEARS

Dirk and Caitlin are now almost seventy years old with hair not even grey anymore, but off-white like the wig of Louis XIV, Le Roi Soleil.

Like old paintings or expensive antique porcelain, their foreheads show a network of fine cracks. Their weathered faces however, look more like the rusty galvanised sheets of a lonely shearingshed in the Australian Outback.

It had again been one of those late-summer hot days that invariably called for Kate's flowery dress; by now even flimsier, owing to forty years of wear.

Of course she could afford to replace it and buy a more modern one, but Dirk didn't let her; he had learnt to handle it like a magician, plus the fact that it always made him feel forty years younger again. In order to not disturb that uplifting image, he had started to avoid looking in the mirror. Shaving was done like touchtyping. Fortunately, during the twilight hours, a refreshing breeze had started to replace the stale air. A few first magnitude stars appeared, gradually complemented by a few secondary ones, while the sprinklers below livened up the grass again.

The cheese and the wine on the small coffee table between the two deckchairs meant that conversation was about to begin.

"Darling, when I got up this morning, I got a brilliant idea."

"Did the Holy Ghost make an emergency landing on that bald spot of yours?"

"Well, if that is your way of describing the advent of an inspiration, I cannot but agree."

"Tell me about it."

"In 2012,"

"If we manage to be alive and well at eighty," interrupted Kate.

"Shush, we have no choice but to make sure that we are; I look after you, and you look after me. I mention 2012, because that's when our film "Titanic 100 Years" will be launched. We're bound to be amongst the specially invited guests again; this time in Hollywood of course."

"We might even receive yet another O.B.E."

"No doubt we will. Even a few Oscars for the script alone wouldn't go astray. But listen, in 2012, the Titanic will still be resting in three pieces on the ocean floor as she is now. There's no point in raising them. If they're silly enough to do so, the whole natural, authentic setting will be lost. It might have been an option if she had still been

in one piece, but not now. No other graveyard could take the place of this one, especially since it has become relatively easy to make the journey to it. Besides, they would disturb the rusticles that cover most of the exposed surfaces of the hull. They represent an immensely complex world of its own with vast labyrinths, ducts and cavities.

It is estimated that a single tonne of it, with all its surfaces spread out, would cover an area almost as big as Hong Kong. At the moment, microbiologist Dr. D. Cullimore's objective is to identify the iron-eating bacteria and to calculate the rate at which the Titanic is disintegrating."

"She might even have gone by then."

"No, since she was still recognisable after ninety years, she'll last another ten, despite the exponential growth of the bacteria. There will be enough left to commemorate the centenary of the disaster. By way of our publicity stunt, we will place an enormous wreath on the wreckage:

Attached to the wreath will be a huge, red ribbon with a white star and the important dates: 1912-2012. With one of those modern submersibles that can reach a maximum depth of 20,000 feet and dive up to twelve hours long, it should be possible. We will no doubt have a world-wide audience again."

"As usual, you are starting at the end. Wouldn't you be better off making the film first?"

"Wait a minute, girl; don't be too hasty. I'm going to give you the plot; it's astonishingly simple and not even my own. The shipbuilder already suggested it during the hearing of the Senate Committee in 1912.

In "Titanic 100 Years" the ship doesn't sink. As soon as First Officer William McMaster Murdoch sees the iceberg, he doesn't do what comes naturally; the only option he has is to do the opposite."

"Preparing for a head-on collision."

"Precisely! When the iceberg comes dangerously close, he changes the telegraph to full astern with the helm hard-a-port. When the ship keeps going too fast, he changes his mind and orders the helmsman to first put the helm hard-a-starboard and seconds after to midships in order to steer straight towards the towering mass of ice."

"So this is the moment when fact finishes and fiction begins!"

"You've got it, although a child could have noticed it."

"You always say that I'm still young at heart."

“And smart! Anyway, the impact is of course devastating. However, instead of the fatal four, only two compartments have been damaged. Fifteen casualties instead of fifteen hundred. Those fifteen crewmembers were asleep in their bunks in the forward part of the ship. Thirty manage to escape from the twisted steel. Water starts pouring in at a tremendous rate.”

“Nobody in his right mind would have made that manoeuvre.”

“Of course not; that’s what makes it so interesting apart from the fact that it had already been proved to be the best.”

“What about Captain Smith?”

“Professional seamen are like dogs; they’re never really asleep because one eye and one ear are always on the alert. As soon as he hears the telegraph play jingle-bells and the First Mate yell at the apprentice to call the captain, he knows there’s trouble. When he arrives on the bridge, he has of course no choice but to come to the conclusion that Murdoch had done the right thing.”

“There wouldn’t have been much point in shouting at him, “You bastard, I told you not to hit icebergs.”

“Your sense of humour seems to increase with age.”

“Where is Ismay?”

“He is a nuisance as usual. Fifth Officer Harold Lowe almost bumps into him when he runs down the bridgestairs, two steps at a time.”

“To warn Ismay’s fiancée or to warn the crewmembers who have their quarters in the front part of the ship?”

“Don’t be too hasty; what I’m describing to you now happens towards the end when the iceberg appears. We have to first work out how to get there as far as our script is concerned. Tell me what you think about the plot.”

“That’s a rather abrupt question. Absolutely thrilling, provided we give it enough body.”

“You talk as if you have a bottle of wine in mind, but I’m pleased to hear that you include me in the process. You can bet your life that the Titanic fever will again become epidemic in 2012.”

“Also without us, although I don’t want to discourage you.”

“Not at all. Cameron’s blockbuster will no doubt again be shown in all cinemas. It would be extremely unwise to compete with it. Since he has already indelibly fixed the

disaster in people's minds, we will have no choice but to stick as closely as possible to his version. It's more a question of complementing it by creating a variation as is done in music. As I said before, in our new film, the Titanic doesn't sink. With only two front compartments damaged, she completes her maiden voyage and steams safely into New York Harbour.

With her bow deep down in the water, her arrival is definitely not the proud and glorious one as was expected, but rather one that symbolises the fact that Man has to finally learn to take into account Mother Nature's supremacy.

Those who have already seen Cameron's "Titanic", will certainly watch "Titanic 100 Years."

Those who haven't will no doubt watch both.

"That means that Rose will again play the leading role."

"Yes, but one that will be quite different. After all, she will then be twenty years older."

"And what about your vintage car?"

"You told me once that I ignored the fact that it was a brand-new car."

"Yes, I did, but I realise now that it will be an oldtimer in the eyes of the viewers. It will again offer its spacious backseat to those who have secretly fallen in love and manage to find their way to the cargo hold."

Even at his rusty age, Dirk never needed much incentive to awaken his bodily desire, so it didn't take him long to find his in hers. Once past the two elongated outer folds of her vaginal orifice, he paused and looked at the full moon in her eyes. Unfortunately, Caitlin broke the spell of his amorous approach and said, "I'm suddenly thinking of that captain who obviously thought that a lowly linen matron shouldn't sit at his table."

"It's a most inappropriate thought to say the least, but anyway, what about him?"

"I'm sorry to suddenly interrupt your intended eruption; it doesn't happen too often though. What's his name again?"

"You mean Captain Lucky?"

"Yes, that's him. Remember the day he asked me what I was doing besides working in the laundry? We were all having dinner with him; the First Mate, the Chief Engineer, the Second, you and I."

"Of course I do, especially since he practically insulted me by calling you Lassie. Fortunately he was unlucky enough to be disliked by the whole crew."

"Yes, and he only started to take me seriously when I gave him my straight answer."

“I forget.” “Having intercourse, writing my notebook about life at sea and whether he could come up with anything better to do. Since he wanted to soften the blow created by my killer instinct, he muttered, “No, eh ... not really,” while his shocked face desperately tried to find support around the table. The others thought it was Christmas.” Since I wanted to modify his opinion of me once and for all, I added, “We are always exercising either our brains or our bodies. We can’t or rather don’t want to think about anything else, Captain. You have to see it like this: Mother Nature has provided him, your Second Officer, with a very sensitive master key, and me with a very receptive keyhole. Don’t you think that it is extremely well planned? Besides, the monotonous sound of the pistons and the peacefulness of the ocean help to make the act of opening and closing a pleasant one without being distracted.” Dirk vividly remembered the scene again. Poor Captain Lucky; Caitlin had him cornered. The work and the time she had put in to get her diplomas had paid off again. Her shocktherapy always worked. Whatever the men thought, she brought it to the surface; cold and cruel. She salvaged, not sunken ships, but sunken taboos planted by tradition and far into the netherworld of the soul. She knew that topless barmaids in a primitive village where women walk around half naked is definitely not something to attract more male customers. However, she was convinced that his afternoon nap was going to be disturbed. She actually felt a bit guilty, despite her diplomas. She realised that she had made him aware of the power of her pussy. In any case, her therapy had worked; he had started to treat her with more respect and caution. Eventually, he had actually started to play her game himself, so there was no need for her to be provocative any longer. She had recuperated her status. In the meantime, Dirk had fallen asleep on her breasts with one nipple in his auricle.

XXIV

When Dirk finally came to because of the evening chill, the nipple had gone so he could hear Caitlin grinding coffee. When he stepped inside, she ignored the fact that he was still a bit groggy and said, “I’m sure Harold Lowe, like you, secretly watched, from the bridge, to see what type of passengers were boarding the ship. No doubt he noticed Rose as well. Can we do something with that?”

Since Dirk’s interest in making the film far outweighed his initial reluctance to continue the brainstorming after the collapse of his extension he answered,

“That’s possible, although not so easy as it seems. You see, in our film, she will be Ismay’s fiancée; they will both be on board. In Cameron’s film, she’s engaged to be married to a wealthy steel magnate who also booked passage, but had to cancel his plans because of business affairs. Nevertheless, I’m sure Harold will be roused to putting forth his best efforts. As far as Rose is concerned, she will be able to create a highly exciting adventure, despite the fact that she is ten years older.” “If we turn Ismay into an arrogant and annoyingly possessive prick, there will automatically be a reason for her temporary escapade.”

“Captain Luck would have been impressed with your wisdom.”

“What do we do with Ballard’s deep sea pictures?” “Not a problem. Cameron shows them in the beginning; we had better put them at the end. Molly Brown is in the Courtroom when Murdoch explains what could have happened if he hadn’t made his seemingly extraordinary decision to run into the iceberg instead of trying to avoid it. In order to prove his point, a flashback will show Ballard taking Molly down to see the rusticated remnants of that ill-fated ship.”

“Molly Brown?”

“You said it. A Titanic without the unsinkable Molly will simply be unthinkable. We will let her also be part of the intrigue. She and Murdoch will make a good pair.”

“Murdoch, that straight-laced fellow?” “Shush; you talk like a seventeen-year-old. Murdoch will be our Humphrey Bogart. Molly with Murdoch and Rose with Harold will make the love-stories. Let’s now make up the tableau de la troupe; the leading roles and the secondary ones. The best way is to arrange them clockwise around the Captain’s table: Edward Smith, Molly Brown, William Murdoch, Rose de Witt Bukater, Bruce Ismay, Mrs. Guggenheim, Ben Guggenheim and Leontine Aumont. A total of eight people: four women, four men.”

“The First Mate at the Captain’s table?”

“Indeed; once in a while, Smith will be the guest of honour elsewhere. In that case, Murdoch will represent him. The vacant seat will be occupied by some prominent person; Comtesse de Rothes or Sir Cosmo Duff Cooper for instance, who were authentic passengers.”

“I don’t quite know what roles you have in mind for Ben’s wife and his mistress Leontine.”

“Caitlin, ... you know of course that not only Ben is having an affair with Leontine; his wife - Peggy’s mother - is just as interested in her as well. Just watch how quickly Molly finds out how it works.”

“Dirk, my boy, you can’t just make statements like that; you’re going to be in trouble.”

“To begin with, Kate, we’ve already made it quite clear that we’re dealing with fiction. Apart from that, in 2012, we will be some five generations further. Our variation fits in quite well with the Guggenheim-image established by the daughter in the Art-world. Furthermore, in her memoirs, Peggy goes out of her way to tell us all about the exotic lifestyle of her parents. As far as Molly is concerned, she will again be the wealthy widow of some railway tycoon from the days that the Wild West was being connected to the civilised world.”

“Evil tongues maintain that she was a prostitute originally.”

“If that is true, she would have made sure that, by the time the old man came past with his new rails, she had gone up the social ladder by becoming the successful and respected owner of a sophisticated teahouse of pleasure.”

“Until he left her his fortune.”

“Thanks for putting the icing on the cake.”

At the Captain’s table, Smith is only a figurehead. Molly will be the hostess so to speak; the cement in the scenario. It means that she will play the same role as in Cameron’s film. This colourful Denver millionairess, naturally brave and lusty for adventure and said to have been running boat No. 6 with a revolver, will, like a silkworm, spin a cocoon around each promiscuous couple in order to monitor their promiscuous development.

Like the Titanic herself, she will become legendary.

Let us start the Transatlantic crossing.

Bruce Ismay, chief executive of the White Star Line, makes the headlines with the most beautiful ship the world has ever known.

“God himself could not sink this ship,” writes Walter Lord in his book “A Night to Remember”.

She has been built to attract the most exclusive first-class passengers, not really to set speed records, although travellers could be sure to safely cross the Atlantic in comfort within a week.

On April 10, 1912, the jet set of the still youngish 20th Century board the ship. We can use all the pictures taken during the Titanic's departure from Southampton."

"I suggest we include that famous one of Captain Smith leaning out of the port window on the bridge while giving orders to Fifth Officer Harold Lowe who seems to be in a dreamworld when he is hanging over the railing a bit further away; most probably to watch Rose de Witt Bukater coming up the gangway with her parasol, obviously used to keep a low profile rather than as a protection against the bleak April sun."

"I'm glad you're aware of the fact that the story virtually writes itself."

It is of course inevitable that the attention must then switch immediately to Ismay in order to establish their relationship. After all, like us, they're engaged to be married. It might mean they never will.

We let him be the proud peacock, and rightly so, strutting slightly ahead of Rose and Ben Guggenheim who is accompanied by his (missis) and his (mistress). He wants to make sure that they are well aware of the fact that they have just boarded the world's largest and most luxurious ship afloat.

"From now on, both the Titanic and her slightly older sistership Olympic will dominate the lucrative North Atlantic run," he remarks with the will of a winner. "After all; "Winners make it happen; losers let it happen," is the slogan in the business world."

"He will no doubt explain why his enormous pets are unsinkable."

"As usual, your timing is perfect. In this particular case however, I'm referring to the fact that, at this very moment, they are joined by Captain Smith, complete with his two medals and his four stripes, First Officer Murdoch with one less and no medals, but with Molly Brown at his side instead."

"My two Officers are of course more qualified to quote the details " continues Ismay by way of introducing the newcomers.

"He is quite relieved when they arrive, because, unwittingly, he had cornered himself" suspects Caitlin.

"Interesting, quite interesting," reacts the ménage à trois.

"I agree wholeheartedly," emphasises Molly while turning immediately to Rose with the question whether she is Mrs. Ismay.

"Molly is already in top form" says Dirk approvingly. "She is both a detective and a psychologist."

"I can easily visualise her in a circus, taming ten lions in a small cage," adds Caitlin.

That's why Ismay is on his knees; he's delighted with Molly's question, especially the way it was put. When Rose explains that she is only engaged to be married, Ismay butts in by saying that it won't be for long, while turning to Rose with a silent invitation to agree. Unfortunately, her reaction is not the jubilant one hoped for. Ismay is taken aback, but only for a few seconds because he quickly realises that a too juvenile behaviour would have been unsuitable for two people who had been married before. Besides, he is well aware of the fact that Rose is not only in her mid thirties, but wealthy and quite independent. He secretly wishes that his premature eagerness was not too obvious and that his mishap would quickly fade away into the corridors of his maritime castle. "This short meeting will stand us in good stead, Kate. The effect will become clear when they meet each other again at the dinner table tonight. Captain Smith will instantly notice that he has to do with a homogeneous, almost private circle that won't give him any headaches as far as seating is concerned." At this stage, Dirk and Caitlin feel as if they are dwelling on Mount Olympus; not as abseiling enthusiasts, but as Gods creating life, because that's what story writing is all about. As a matter of fact, they're even far superior; apart from those who die, they bring forth immortals, whereas they themselves may be mere illusions.

XXV

The sea is so calm that most passengers are able to enjoy the rich meals that had been served. As usual, Ismay is bragging.

"How unsinkable is your ship Mr. Ismay?" challenges Molly.

"What do you mean madam?"

"Exactly the way I formulated my question. However, I will repeat it. How unsinkable is your ship; are we in your hands or in God's?"

"If I were you, madam, I wouldn't even think about it."

Molly is not happy at all with his evasive answer and immediately goes in overdrive.

"No ship is unsinkable, Mr. Bruce. I clearly remember my grandfather saying it time and time again when I was only a little girl, and grandpa was always right. He went around Cape Horn many times in his three-mast bark.

"The Titanic is not a sailing ship, Mrs. Brown."

"Does that summarise your explanation?"

“Mrs. Brown, I’ll be a bit more specific. To begin with, my Titanic has a double bottom.”

“I bet you’ve got one too, Mr. Bruce.”

Instant laughter, although the Guggenheims seem a little shocked at first. However, when

Ismay keeps talking about “His Titanic”, they soon join the others in the fun. Only Captain Smith and Murdoch feel a bit uneasy, because they are part and parcel of the Titanic, but over the years they’ve come to realise that they have been no more than manipulated pawns on the Company’s chessboard.

Officers had little say in the matter. Lightoller is only Second despite his First Mate’s ticket. Lowe is Fourth, but signed on as Fifth. Captain Smith is allowed to take command before retiring from his distinguished twenty-six-year career with the White Star Line, provided he does what Ismay says which means full speed ahead. The reciprocating engines with the power of 30,000 horses can produce a cruising speed of 23 to 24 knots.

Murdoch is well aware of the obvious anomaly, but he’s got to keep his mouth shut. The rivalry and the hatred amongst the officers didn’t really surface during the hearing of the Senate Committee. By adopting the very policy of playing chess with their men, companies virtually created people who had no qualms about getting ahead at the expense of their colleagues. Smith kept himself aloof, afraid of betting on the wrong horse and spoiling his retirement pension.

“Let us go back to Molly throwing down the gauntlet,” suggests Dirk.

“Excuse me Mrs. Brown, why do you call me Mr. Bruce; isn’t that a bit unusual?”

“Not at all Mr. Bruce. You see, I am a customer and that puts me automatically in a royal seat. I’m sure that you had this ship built to attract as many queens and kings as possible.”

The Guggenheims are warmed up by now, but Smith and Murdoch are at pains to suppress their appreciation of this blunt remark. Unfortunately, Rose causes an even more embarrassing situation when she burst out laughing and adding that SHE should be considered a queen as well owing to the fact that she had paid for the trip herself, indicating quite clearly that she was still single and not yet an Ismay.

Molly is so impressed that she tells Rose to call her Molly henceforth.

When she then confronts Ismay with the fact that Cunard's Mauretania is the fastest ship with a record-setting pace of 26 to 28 knots, enabling her to dash across the Atlantic in fewer than five days, he is devastated. Molly on the other hand is relentless and seems to be determined to bring Mr. Bruce down to earth, at least the aquatic part of it.

"What do we do when we hit an iceberg, Mr. Bruce?"

"I don't quite understand what makes you say that. At the moment, we are at the same latitude as the French Riviera; did you ever see icebergs there?"

"As a matter of fact, I did; there are huge ones near Nice with plenty of ski-resorts."

"Mrs. Brown, I do appreciate your sense of humour, but I will answer your question nevertheless, especially since you ARE a queen. Again, there is no need to worry. Even with three compartments damaged, we will keep afloat. A head-on collision will at most crumple one. I hope that this new knowledge will satisfy your curiosity."

In order to make sure that the others realise that he is making the decision, he turns to Captain Smith to have him confirm that the steamcocks are still wide open. Convinced that everybody enjoyed their meal, he rises, desperately hoping that Rose will do the same. Knowing quite well that not only Molly but she herself had also made him feel extremely uncomfortable, she does in order to join him. Since Ismay is dissatisfied with the predicament he had been in, he conveys to her his intention to change the set-up around the table. As could be expected, Rose doesn't agree with him and convinces him that he definitely can't upset the Guggenheims, and that it is not up to him to reorganise the Captain's table; after all, Smith is in charge of the whole ship. Ismay is not at all happy with her snide remark, but bows to her wishes, albeit half-heartedly. While Ben and his female companions are getting up from the table, Molly considers it an opportune moment to ask Smith whether she is allowed to pay a visit to the bridge that evening. The Captain has no objections, but tells her to do so from 10 p.m. onwards, during the second half of the First Watch when First Officer Murdoch will be on duty. At the same time he informs her that only the Captain and the First Officer are allowed to mingle with the passengers, in case she was not familiar with the Company's policy.

XXVI

William McMaster is delighted; he is quite keen to entertain that seemingly lusty widow. At 9:30 p.m., they are already in the lounge. Since there is at least fifteen

minutes before they are meant to go up, Molly decides that she had better go back to her cabin to fetch her furcoat. Everything is set for an exciting overture.

Lowe has already been on duty since 8 p.m. together with the Second Officer.

Murdoch will join him and relieve the Second at ten and stay on till midnight.

Lowe likes this arrangement, because he feels much more comfortable with Murdoch, especially since Lightoller is always whinging.

When he hears Molly chatting away to his superior when they arrive, he is quite happy to be the only one responsible for a while and to leave Murdoch alone with his catch. At the end of each watch, officers must do the rounds to make sure that everything is in order. The fact that it is, must then be recorded in the journal. For the first time in his life, Murdoch goes overboard, but of course not so far that a lifeboat has to be lowered to save him.

He goes everywhere, because Molly is still with him. He wants to savour their togetherness as long as possible. His watertight torch shines left, right and centre. On the promenade deck, they walk already arm in arm, because Molly wanted it that way. As a matter of fact, her voluptuous volume settles itself as tightly as possible against his; after all, the deck could be slippery.

Murdoch has no choice but to listen to the replay of the conversation at the dinner table. "What's the story about the Guggenheims and the other lady?" she wants to know next. "According to me, they have a *ménage à trois*," answers Murdoch because, during his career as navigator come hotelier, he has seen it all. Molly could be compared with a little child who wants to know the ins and outs of everything. Besides, if you are convinced that you have answered one question completely, you are going to be either annoyed or disappointed to discover that the child will come back like a thunderstorm in order to strike you with yet another lightning query about the same subject.

"If we scrape against an iceberg, will it rip open our ship completely?"

"Far out," thinks Murdoch; "This is a fine kettle of fish!"

"You could say that. If we scrape one while going full speed ahead, it will indeed rip us apart."

"And if more than three compartments are being damaged, what then?"

"If they are three consecutive compartments, one more will be fatal, at least if they are the four front ones. The bow will plunge deep into the water which will then run over the top of the watertight bulkheads because they don't reach to the deck above."

It hadn't taken Murdoch long to discover as well as to enjoy Molly's effervescent and inquisitive personality.

It gave him an opportunity to offload a few of his grudges about Ismay and Smith, not personal ones, but more those concerning safety.

Although he realised that it created a sword with two cutting edges, he ventured a subtle remark that was sure to be right up her alley.

"Mr. Ismay's double bottom is a structural one and a safety feature, not a panacea. In this case, all compartments will gradually fill up and"

"Cause the ship to sink, completes Molly as quick as a worm-picking hen"

"Molly, why are you so hung-up on icebergs?"

"I'm glad you asked, William. Years ago, I read a book about a passenger ship that hit an iceberg and sunk. It went through the same stages as you just described. Granted, it is fiction, but still..."

"What book are you talking about?"

"Futility!, written about ten years ago by Morgan Robertson".

It also deals with an Atlantic crossing, but in the opposite direction; from America to England. After the collision, the Captain assures the passengers that there is nothing to worry about; Ismay no doubt copied his very words.

They nevertheless went down, the lot of them.

"Why, it's only a story," remarks Murdoch.

"You're right. However, since I booked this trip, that very story keeps on milling around in my head; it's like an omen. As soon as I give you the name of that particular ship, you'll understand".

"Well?"

"TITAN!"

"Good heavens, this woman is unreal," thinks Murdoch, and says,

"I can't deny the coincidence, but I refuse to be superstitious; I'm not one of those ancient seafarers who went out of their way to predict disasters; it created a cult of its own."

He remembers the messages received from nearby ships; they were all warnings regarding field ice and icebergs. He wisely refrains from informing Molly, which is not too difficult

because she doesn't shut up talking about her misgivings.

"Initially I told myself to stop being silly because I'm not like your ancient seafarers either, so I ignored it. Unfortunately, the story is now so insistent that it actually drives me crazy; its no use fighting it. My visions of hitting an iceberg are so vivid that I have become upset and worried. I dread going to bed by myself. At least I feel quite safe in your company. It's amazing how a picture of an iceberg as sharp as reality is literally engraved in one's memory.

"Did you read ..."

"Yes, I did, so I know full well that we can expect them on our way. I've also learnt that it is safer, as a last resort, to run straight into an iceberg rather than let it scrape the side, no matter how thick the plates, no matter how many rows of rivets."

"Did the author of that book write that?"

"Yes, he did, and the slower the less disastrous the damage."

"Well, that stands to reason."

"Not as far as the Captain was concerned. He obviously didn't know either that you can even smell icebergs."

"My God, she's a smart woman," thinks Murdoch again.

"I even know that the best way to spot an iceberg from a distance is to look for the ring of white foam created by waves lapping against its base."

"Not always, Molly; if the sea is as smooth as a mirror, there is no white ring. Anyway, at this latitude, there is only field ice which can be noticed in time, provided the ship is proceeding at a safe speed."

"That's rather vague, William; what do you mean by that?"

"When we talk about a safe speed, we are referring to a very precise definition in the Maritime Law which consists of a great number of Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea. It states: A safe speed is one that prevents a vessel from colliding with another vessel; a speed that allows for some necessary manoeuvre to be made in order to avoid a collision with another vessel as soon as it comes insight, as well as for the possibility to stop the vessel within half the visibility."

"Is an iceberg considered to be a ship?"

"Absolutely."

"I want you to help me memorise that definition."

Murdoch has no objections because he can oblige by just hanging over the railing. When Molly is finally able to recite the regulation without any omissions, she is

ecstatic. She has the feeling that this “Magic Formula” will do the trick; like “Abracadabra”, it will pull the nasty rabbits out of her head. Suddenly, she grabs Murdoch, turns him around, looks into his eyes and begs, “William, I want you to promise me that, whenever you see an iceberg, and it is too late to avoid it, you go for it.”

“I will,” says William with a smile.

It’s quite easy for him to make that promise, because he himself had already decided to do so in case the situation presents itself. He had better discuss this new variation with Smith though. He gives her a hug despite the fact that such a procedure is not really part of the standard protocol. After all, at this stage, she’s still a passenger. “Thanks, that feels already much better. I’m sure I will be able to sleep without being afraid,” she says with a reciprocal smile.

William and Molly continue their interrupted rounds and finish up on the boat deck. They are not alone despite the early hours of the morning. Passengers like to use it mainly to stretch their legs, because it is not really a romantic venue. The complex array of steel cables, grotesque davits, ropes and covered lifeboats only offer an imperfect hiding place for promiscuous couples. That’s why it didn’t take them long before spotting an amorous Leontine Aumont and a lover.

“Is that Ben Guggenheim?” asked Molly innocently.

“Are you kidding? It’s his wife,” whispered Murdoch. “This is a good opportunity to see for yourself what I suspected before.”

The two kept walking, as discreetly as possible; their bodies even closer together than before, because it might give the erroneous impression of only one figure passing by. Murdoch’s nocturnal eyes however, have seen more than just Ben’s wife alone. When they are a bit further, Murdoch tells Molly that there is yet another surprise coming up. While standing on their toes behind one of the davits of the next boat, they not only see two people, but a human silhouette with the same shape as Ben.

“So now you know Molly,” says Murdoch when they are a bit further away.

“I’m sure that you will sleep even better now. I just knew that you were intrigued by this.”

As always, when you see someone eat a juicy hamburger, you want one too. When you’re hungry, don’t go shopping.

So it is not so unusual for the lusty widow to tell Murdoch that she wants to be kissed in the same way, except, in this case by a man. It's not difficult for Murdoch to satisfy her request. The moon's crescent in its last quarter seems an appropriate as well as a timely background; in two more days, it will be new moon, a rather funny expression when our satellite is invisible. After their short intimacy, Molly tells William that it is time to go to bed, so he accompanies her, arm in arm, until they have reached her cabin. That is invariably the moment that any real male's heart begins to beat much faster; that's why these moments can easily cause an old man to have a stroke. It's like putting high octane in an old, two-stroke lawnmower. Fortunately, Molly is seasoned enough to know the problem; she's not an old-fashioned highschool girl any more. Besides, she seems to be keen herself to have some loving company. In order to not be too blunt doors are always opened after the invitation to come in for coffee. However, Molly's kettle never boiled. William never saw his own cabin. They have breakfast together; that's when the coffee is needed. An early morning steward will no doubt be delighted to spread the news.

XXVII

Supper on the second day of the journey starts off amicably.

After the soup however, Molly starts to stir again.

"Have you got any children Mrs. Guggenheim?"

"We've only got our daughter Peggy, Mrs. Brown; she has just turned twelve."

"So you haven't been married all that long?"

Ben butts in before his wife has time to calculate the exact figure.

"Twelve years and nine months to be precise," he answers ironically.

Since he is aware of the fact that she and Murdoch had seen him on the boat deck, he decides not only to keep control of the conversation, but to also give moralistic Ismay a bit of a shock, so he fires his first rocket.

"Mrs. Brown, I'm sure that you are dying to ask a few more personal questions. I might as well forego all formalities by telling you that both my wife and I have a lover. Amongst our friends, that is not something terribly unusual. What makes it so interesting for gossiping people is the fact that we are intimate with one and the same person."

When Molly stares at his mistress, he adds, "Isn't it Leontine?"

Ismay looks up in disgust. Rose chuckles.

Molly realises that Ben has taken the wind out of her sails, so she decides to still get some mileage out of them by changing her tack.

“Your unsinkable speedboat is nothing compared to that, Mr. Bruce!”

Mrs. Guggenheim seizes the opportunity to throw all the cards on the table in order to stop any further speculation and says, “So now you all know; Leontine and I both love a man as well as a woman; it was never meant to be a secret anyway.” Caitlin is afraid that the plot gets a bit out of hand and asks, “Dirk, do you really think that people talked like that in 1912?”

“But Kate, didn’t we start off by saying that the Guggenheims were hedonists?”

They were surrounded by artists and bohemians. They were rich and independent. Even in 1912, they managed to ignore middle class morals by adopting an unconventional lifestyle. Apart from that, our readers and T.V. watchers live in the beginning of the next Century; they love their ratrace to be pickled with some chilly sauce. “And what about Miss Aumont?”

“She has no qualms about it either. She is a professional and an entertainer; it’s her livelihood. She is intelligent enough to look after herself. She just concentrates on another version of “Noblesse oblige”. She is a marchioness, remember.”

“They all seem to take the mickey out of Ismay.”

“That’s exactly why he desperately tries to lead the conversation into another direction. One thing is indisputable: He wants to impress Rose first and foremost. He is determined to portray himself as Poseidon, God of the Sea.

However, he has much more than just a trident. He has a magnificent, ocean-slicing seacastle and wants to make sure that everyone knows that; with it, he rules the waves. That’s why he will turn to Smith saying that HIS average speed is quite impressive. He will even sarcastically tell Molly that, hopefully, there won’t be any icebergs. He may even get a bit of a laugh out of it if it weren’t for the startled faces of both Smith and Murdoch, because, in the meantime, the two men are well aware of the warnings received. Ismay still thinks that they’re heading for the French Riviera. Molly bounces back of course.

“Yes, Ismay forgets that she can’t be underestimated.”

“Mr. Bruce, Mrs. Brown will be on the lookout, although not in the crow’s nest; the binoculars are on the bridge, I’ve used them already while Mr. Murdoch showed me around. As soon as an iceberg comes in sight, I’ll inform you. No doubt you know that, as far as collisions are concerned, an iceberg is considered to be a vessel like yours; not

only that, it is by definition unsinkable. The question is, Who is David and who is Goliath? I'll rephrase that: It's God against Man." "I don't quite get you, Mrs. Brown. How can an iceberg considered to be a ship like mine?" "According to the Maritime Law, you have to be able to avoid colliding with it and proceed at a safe speed when circumstances are suspect. Moreover, you have to be able to stop your ship at half the distance between your ship and the iceberg." "Mrs. Brown has her Master's ticket," jokes Murdoch while turning to Ismay. Molly is the only one who appreciates his remark. The others don't quite know what to make of the worried faces of the Captain and the First Officer.

XXVIII

Needless to say that Molly wants to join Murdoch again when he is on duty. As soon as she arrives, Lowe welcomes her with a broad smile; her affair with the First is obviously not a secret any longer.

Tonight, her outfit is far more suitable, although she's not wearing trousers.

The crescent of the night before is now half as thin.

William doesn't mention icebergs and Molly understands why. After all, she has her magic formula, she feels quite safe.

When they do the rounds and arrive on the boat deck again, the Guggenheims are not inspecting the boats and the davits this time; they were found to be in order the night before.

Since Murdoch is now assured of sharing Molly's hot water bottle, there is no need to indulge in school boys' stuff, although a bit of excitement wouldn't go astray, so he pretends to show Molly the engine room instead. Unashamedly she lowers herself down the steep ladders, carefully treading on the open, oily steps one by one, knowing full well that smirky faces will look up to see whether they can get a glimpse of her privacy. However, the boilers keep hissing while the men keep guessing.

They see nothing because Molly's calves and her thighs a bit higher up are tightly covered in wool.

After descending a couple of those ladders, they arrive at a fairly large platform. Murdoch opens a watertight door that gives access to the cargo hold.

Once inside, he shines his torch onto ... the old-timer.

Molly knows of course straight away what's going to happen; she quite likes the idea of having a naughty in such an unconventional venue. William obviously wants to remove the woollen wrappers that so annoyingly blocked the men's vision a few minutes earlier. Unfortunately, their hasty excitement is instantly being squashed. They are not the only ones with basic urges that have to be satisfied. While Murdoch was doing his rounds, Fifth Officer Lowe had been doing his homework. Encouraged by the gallantry of his superior, he had encroached upon a far more precarious adventure. He is already in the car with ... none other than Rose, Ismay's fiancée. It proves again that men seem to all have a very limited number of original ideas to entertain women.

Ever since he saw the Renault hang in the slings and Rose come up the gangway, he had visions of making love to her in it.

However, when Molly and Murdoch arrive on the scene, the young Don Juan feels quite uncomfortable, and so does Rose. As a matter of fact, all four look stunned.

Doing the rounds doesn't really include checking whether the old-timer is still secure. However, as soon as the last signs of surprise have ebbed away, they all burst out laughing.

This unusual spectacle would remind one of a window-dresser changing the display in a store like David Jones. Two naked mannequins on the backseat of a vintage car, ready to become driver and passenger. Auntie Molly already dressed up in an expensive furry outfit, accompanied by Uncle William, her husband, in an impressive Merchant Navy uniform with three stripes. They must obviously create the illusion that the backseat drivers are about to go on their honeymoon. In this setting, the uniform and the stripes of Uncle William are not used to define the difference in ranks between him and one of the dummies, of course.

Auntie Molly and Uncle William have no choice but to prematurely wave the mannequins good-bye and to go back to the watertight door and the oily ladders again.

They proceed to Murdoch's cabin this time, not without bumping into Captain Smith of course which is not really a problem because the First Officer is licensed so to speak. Rose and Harold continue to giggle for a while before concentrating on the act. William and Molly do likewise. This most unusual incident seemed to have encouraged both couples.

Although Murdoch is more than happy with his lucky draw, he's dying to know how Lowe pulled off such a seemingly difficult feat.

XXIX

As soon as supper is served on the third day of the Titanic's maiden voyage, Ismay is again boasting about the ship's speed.

Murdoch has noticed that Captain Smith has given orders to the Chief Engineer to take it easy because a speed of 22 knots would still enable him to reach New York in less than six days.

Molly and Rose eye one another approvingly.

The Guggenheims obviously had a busy afternoon because their knives and forks move somewhat lethargically.

Captain Smith excuses himself by saying that he won't join them the following day; his company is requested at the Harland and Wolff table.

Since he says it with a twinkle in his eyes, Molly suspects that he is glad to have supper without Ismay for a change.

The relationship between Rose and Ismay doesn't appear to be a happy one either, otherwise he wouldn't have started to belittle her in front of the others.

Molly immediately seizes the opportunity to ask Captain Smith if Fifth Officer Lowe would be allowed to sit in with them because the young man seems such a nice person.

Her audacious, slightly insulting request is of course accompanied by an almost imperceptible wink at Rose.

"Mrs. Brown, I've already informed you that petty officers are not permitted to mingle with passengers; Company rule."

"Captain Smith, as a customer of that very Company, I am convinced that you have the discretion to comply with my simple request; after all, as an apprentice of Mr. Murdoch it would be a valuable experience for him that will pay off in the long run. Unless Mr. Bruce, the owner, is against it, I can't see any problems."

Molly's eyes are glued to those of Ismay. No answer is also an answer.

Ismay is intelligent enough to know that a refusal would indicate a threat to his male ego. Most probably he doesn't know anything about Rose's disappearance, but no doubt she must have mentioned that she too thought Lowe was a good looking sort.

Not only that, she's bound to have had at least a conversation with him. Only Molly and Murdoch know that it was more than that.

Like a parent unwilling to give in to a demanding child, Smith obliges by stating a condition to save his face.

“You understand of course that Fifth Officer Lowe has to be on the bridge at a quarter to eight.” Molly gladly accepts his demand. When they all get up from the table, Rose whispers in Molly’s ear that she’ll keep a low profile. Molly tells her not to worry in order to make her feel a bit more at ease. Since Ismay has treated Molly also as a little girl, Rose knows that she can count on the lusty widow; she knows the power of a woman’s revenge.

XXX

Since the others occupy their usual seats, the contrast between Lowe and Smith is rather conspicuous, apart from the deficiency in stripes.

Like Dirk on the New Amsterdam, the pencil-thin ones on Harold’s uniform are enough reason for Ismay to emphasise the young officer’s low rank.

“I hope you’re aware that Mrs. Brown has done you a most unusual favour by letting you sit at the Captain’s table; in the absence of Captain Smith, she thought it would be a good experience for you,” sneered Ismay.

“I’m extremely grateful, Mr. Ismay”
As Fifth Officer it’s indeed very uncommon to be allowed to enjoy the company of such distinguished people. I’ll do my utmost neither to disappoint nor to embarrass you.”

Stupid Ismay; he’s too arrogant to realise that nobody wants to share his disdain for someone who seems quite capable of making himself an equal, at least as far as conversation is concerned. After all, not every Tom, Dick and Harry (no pun) would be selected to be an officer on the Company’s flagship.

Rose is visually delighted with Harold’s submissive, yet cheeky performance.

She obviously has the shits with her husband-to-be.

The two had another rendezvous in the old-timer; Rose’s body is still tingling.

When Molly sees Rose smile at Harold, she takes over in order to negotiate the bend in the conversation.

“Mr. Lowe, as you already indicated yourself, officially you’re not supposed to sit at our table; Captain Smith has already stressed the point twice to me.”

“That’s right, Mrs. Brown.”

Since they have already called each other by their Christian names. both Molly and Harold enjoy their act immensely.

“It would nevertheless be possible for a charming young man like you to fall in love with an attractive female passenger, wouldn’t it, Mr. Lowe?”

In the meantime, Rose sits with cramped toes.

“I suppose it would, Mrs. Brown. However, I’ve decided not to succumb to that obvious temptation because I would instantly lose my chance to be promoted,” answers Lowe while looking Ismay in the face. Ismay straight away grabs the opportunity to assume the role of the Almighty God once more. “Mr. Lowe, you will no doubt be interested to know that I have a little surprise for you; it seems to fit in quite well with what you just said. Captain Smith has already informed me that he is quite impressed with your performance. That’s why I have decided to promote you to Fourth Officer.” “That’s very considerate of you, Mr. Ismay. However, I want to point out to you that I already AM, although your Office told me to sign on as Fifth. They most probably thought of doing me a favour, seeing that your ship has already become world famous. If You and Captain Smith really wanted to promote me, I should become Third. Everybody laughs except Ismay. He is too thick-skinned to be perturbed, so he gets up from the table, hoping that everyone has enjoyed their meal and walks off, this time without waiting for Rose, which is a statement in itself.

XXXI

Lowe goes up to the bridge to join Lightoller. Two hours later, when Molly arrives in her by now standard clothing, Lowe welcomes her joyously.

“We’ve played with fire,” she tells him.

“Say that again! It wouldn’t surprise me if the dictator changes his mind and keeps me on as Fifth, but it could well be that he WILL promote me, just to save his face.”

Molly can’t help putting in her two cents worth.

“Harold, my boy, forget about Ismay; you’ve already organised your promotion in the old-timer.”

“How’s that, Molly?”

“When Rose becomes Mrs. Ismay, she’ll be the one making it happen.”

“Will she really marry Ismay, you think?”

“You’re a give-away, Harold; you’re deeply in love, I can see it.” At that very moment, Murdoch seems preoccupied because he’s running to and fro the radioroom a couple of times.

“Double the lookouts!” he snarls at Lowe.

It only takes a few minutes to get four extra men on duty; one in the crow’s nest, one up front and one on either side of the bridge.

When Murdoch has calmed down again, Molly cuddles up to him and asks, “Do you smell it?”

William nods.

“And what about that safe speed?”

“That’s up to the Captain. Provided we spot it in time we can keep going the way we are. I would have liked to get at this point during daylight. Since it is new moon, icebergs are as black as the ace of spades. With four extra people looking out, we stand a much better chance though.”

“Excuse me William, what about me?”

“I’m sorry Molly, you’re right,” he says while putting his arm around her.

During the next hour, nothing changes. Soon it will be midnight.

Suddenly, Molly shouts, “ICEBERG!” Murdoch runs to the port wing only to see that she’s right. At the same time the lookout in the crow’s nest rings the bell three times which means the giant is straight ahead. Murdoch grabs the binoculars and yells, “God Almighty!”

referring not to Ismay, but to the pitch black mass.

“Full astern, and hard-a port!” The telegraph tinkles, the helmsman turns the wheel with all the speed he can muster. “Call the Captain!” shouts Murdoch at the extra lookout in the wing. “Wake up all the men in the forecandle, the damned thing is awfully close!”

While Lowe is on the phone, Molly wants to know whether they’re going at a safe speed. Murdoch doesn’t answer; this is really the wrong time for a passenger to be on the bridge so he almost pushes her aside when she’s standing in front of the entrance to the wheelhouse. Poor Molly; nobody but SHE saw the iceberg first. In an emergency, there is no time for hanky-panky stuff.

However, William McMaster Murdoch does what he promised to do, because it takes far too long to stop the huge vessel going at 22 knots; she’s definitely not like the Manly Ferry. Putting the telegraph on full astern takes less than one second.

Shutting down 29 huge boilers in order to reverse the engines is another thing.

Opening up the cocks again to finally slow down is a complex matter which is all part and parcel of going along at a safe speed. Twenty-two knots was obviously not a safe

speed. Since the ship doesn't respond quickly enough and it has become impossible to avoid the iceberg altogether, Murdoch changes to hard-a starboard and steady as she goes in order to hit the colossus head-on.

The stand-by sailor who was told to call the Captain hurtles himself down the stairs only to wipe him off his feet because his hurried action coincides with the shock generated by the collision.

It's quite understandable why soldiers, policemen and maritime commodores wear uniforms with or without stripes and medals. Stripped of them, they look like any Joe Blow, especially after having been asleep or even half asleep like a dog. It makes it worse when Joe is sprawling on the floor, hastily dressed in a pair of pants with an open fly and braces down.

During the commotion, Smith is not the only one being knocked about. Young Harold Lowe, on his way to the forecastle, clearly jeopardises his promotion when he pushes Ismay aside while yelling, "Get out of my bloody way!"

The Titanic's bow is a mess. Two watertight compartments are crumpled as if they were made of papier-mâché.

Crew members everywhere; running, shouting and helping those trapped amongst the twisted steel, screeching or screaming for help. Water is pouring in with the power of an Hawaiian surf but with a Snowy Mountains temperature.

Lowe takes charge; his eagle eye misses nothing, his brain works overtime.

Gradually, the flow of incoming water decreases. The damaged Titanic, covered in chunks of ice, lies motionless in the silent sea. All those alive are on deck; some wearing life-jackets although their precaution soon appears to be unnecessary.

When the other officers come onto the bridge, Smith orders them to evaluate the damage. In the meantime, Ismay has arrived as well. When he sees Molly, he asks in a voice that is almost back to normal, "What on earth are you doing here, Mrs. Brown?"

"I've got news for you, Mr. Bruce! Firstly, to spot the iceberg, and secondly to check whether you were proceeding at a safe speed. Unfortunately, you weren't because you were too eager to reach New York in less than six days. You didn't give a damn about all those on board; your bloody ego was obviously more important."

Ismay has no time to say anything, let alone defend himself, because the inspection team is back and Smith is listening to the details. Fortunately, the water didn't rise higher than four to five feet below the top of the second bulkhead.

Both Smith and Murdoch then go to the forecandle to see how Lowe's rescue operations are getting along. The Fifth Officer, who is now soaking wet, informs them that thirteen people have died. A head-count revealed that two are still missing. All men had been trapped in their cabins. Engine room personnel had managed to cut big enough holes to get them out. The dead bodies would later on be wrapped up in sailcloth and be transferred to a spare freezer. It takes the rescue squad still another three hours to locate the remains of the two sailors. The fact that Smith has to actually send for Ismay to make him see for himself what his stubborn arrogance has caused, sums up the Chief Executive's cowardice as well as the Captain's sweet revenge.

While twisting around Molly's words, the hypocrite remarks, "Just as well we were going along at a safe speed when the accident happened, otherwise the damage might have been fatal."

Finally Captain Smith shows a bit of mettle and sarcasm when he scoffs, "Mr. Ismay, thanks to your stupid interference, we did not maintain a safe speed despite the numerous warnings about field ice and icebergs relayed by other ships; you put in your pocket the most urgent one while boasting to your guests that you would even increase your speed to escape them. If we had done 15 knots, we would have been able to wind up in front instead of on top."

When the rescue operations have been finalised, Smith gives orders to put the telegraph on half astern in order to see if it is possible to ease the ship away from the iceberg. It takes at least fifteen minutes before the ship responds.

Once free, Murdoch convinces him that it would be safer to await daylight before heading for New York, so while the Titanic lays to, radio operators start working Cape Race to inform the White Star Office as well as the Port Authorities.

When the Titanic slowly picks up speed, all eyes are glued to the spot where the ship had bumped into earlier on. It is found that by cruising along at a comfortable speed of ten knots, water won't run into the third compartment.

After a short Memorial Service, everything changes.

Suppers are not what they used to be; there is no more class distinction.

Everyone talks to everyone else; there is only one topic.

Everyone eats with everyone else; the general consensus is that the Titanic proved indeed to be unsinkable.

Like a hibernating rattlesnake, Ismay goes into hiding; he has run out of venom, he's in shock because his ship as well as his pride has been severely damaged.

Doctors advise to put him in the sick-bay. Rose is the only one allowed in. She at least tries to mean something to him. Further romance is out of the question; Lowe understands without grudge. Molly is grateful to William; he went for it as he promised he would. Murdoch is desperately trying to justify the number of casualties he caused. Should he have warned Lowe about his intentions? Then again, he could hardly have let him tell the crew what he would do in case the iceberg couldn't be completely avoided. The men would certainly have tapped their index on their head meaning to say, "These guys are crazy; why not slow down?" Lowe would have had to point out that the Captain didn't want to do that. Crazier still; the owner didn't want to let the Captain do what the man wanted to do. He would have had to discuss with Lowe what was impossible to do with the Captain. The very moment he had ordered the stand-by sailor to call the Captain, calamity had struck. When the old man had resurrected himself, it was already too late to interfere. William is convinced that he won't go scot-free. Molly tries to comfort him the best she can.

XXXII

Gentle, white crested waves curl up against Her Majesty's boxer face heading for Ambrose Lightvessel. She has lost her feminine gracefulness; she's been hurt. The last day on board is awful: The dead, the destroyed ideals, the reality. The ménage-à-trois is hanging over the railing; their deluxe tour will end in disappointment.

Rose has gone up to the bridge to get some comfort from Lowe. He tells her what's going to happen.

The ship's Marconi Operators are flat out sending and receiving messages.

Headlines are screaming. TITANIC UNSINKABLE takes up ten full columns in the morning newspaper. The article that follows describes the collision in detail, but sticks to the facts for the time being.

As soon as the Titanic enters the Narrows between State Island and Brooklyn, small craft with journalists are upon her.

Some crazy reporters even manage to climb on board. Only a few dollars are needed to make the sailors throw a ropeladder over the railing.

It still takes a couple of hours before the Titanic docks at White Star Piers 58 and 59. In the meantime, more newspapers roll off the press.

They are full of the most contradictory quotes from crew members and passengers.

Less important seems to be the comments made about Ismay's crazy idea to go full speed ahead in order to satisfy his pride.

Only during the next few days, the most important question asked will no doubt be whose ultimate fault it was to cause so many dead and so much damage.

Outsiders will unanimously blame of course Captain Smith.

Insiders are free to give their opinion as well. Discussions about Ismay's stand over tactics abound.

The rule that the Captain has the ultimate responsibility is repeated over and over again. Retired Captains who are now free to say what they want, give explicit details about the problems they had in order to comply with the requirements of the companies they served. Nevertheless, Captain Smith made the very grievous mistake to allow his ship to go too fast; he was obviously stimulated by the presence of two other important and involved egos, namely Ismay and Andrews from Harland and Wolff. All were British.

A showman is always in desperate need to show off; the opportunity to do so was too tempting. Unfortunately, his overconfidence got the better of him.

However it was not negligence because he had been following the established custom and practice by not slowing down for ice-warnings in clear weather. The most important aim was to make sure that passengers and cargo arrived according to schedule regardless of dangerous conditions.

That's why it is so ironic that a framed notice behind glass in the chartroom of every White Star liner was supposed to draw the attention of the deck-officers to a series of principles, the first of which was "the vital importance of exercising the utmost caution in navigation, safety outweighing every other consideration." The "Ship's Rules" contained the following order: "The Chief Officer is held jointly responsible with the Commander for the safe and proper navigation of the steamer, and it shall be his duty to make a respectful representation to the Commander if he apprehended danger, when his responsibility shall cease.

In an obvious attempt to kill two birds with the one stone, it was customary to pay masters and officers a substantial bonus if the ships on which they were sailing managed to escape damage during the year, a fact which shows how common mishaps were in those days.

As always, money is the root of all evil. Since money makes money, the Devil is part of life; He is the inevitable and necessary antipode of God, it doesn't matter which one.

The very fact that companies demoted officers according to their whims, shows that they didn't have any regard for them. During the trials of the Titanic, Murdoch was still Chief Officer and Lightoller First Officer. During the maiden voyage Wilde, against his will, replaced Murdoch, who in turn replaced Lightoller who, despite his master's ticket, became Second. Ship and crew were only the means to make money, much like soldiers to win wars .

The American Almighty Morgan-owner of the Titanic-nurtured an anything-goes approach to business, encouraging his lines to cut more corners, save more time and not shrink from dirty tricks on the North Atlantic route, such as the cartel with the Germans aimed at destroying Cunard. The very fact that the Californian owned by Morgan didn't come to the rescue is extremely suspicious.

Captain Smith was the man to realise Morgan's objectives. His indifference to danger and his confidence would yield the aimed for outcomes. Besides, Smith looked the part: a solid, majestic figure in his long, navy-blue coat with the two medals on his heart and the four gold rings on each sleeve, with his braiden peaked cap and his neatly trimmed beard. Smith had a naturally radiating good humour and hardly ever raised his voice.

Despite attaching importance to discipline and respect, he managed to be popular with his superiors as well as with his peers and subordinates, a rare quality amongst men.

During questioning, Lightoller told the Senator that it was an education to see Smith piloting his ship through the intricate channels entering New York at full speed with a couple of feet between the ship and the sandbanks.

That's probably why he ran ships aground so often. Still, this more or less reckless approach proved to pay off.

In the past twenty years, there had been 32,000 crossings involving just twenty-five accidents in which sixty-eight passengers and eighty sailors had lost their lives.

Our present death record on the road is far worse.

The White Star Line comes under scrutiny.

The Titanic was the second ship of the Company to hit an iceberg. Since the disaster, the U.S. Coast Guard runs an International Ice Patrol funded by North Atlantic Nations.

The company's erratic and dramatic history was exceptional, even by the buccaneering standards during the heyday of industrial capitalism. However, hindsight will never meet foresight. It doesn't even matter whether the Titanic was really the Olympic, the insurance of which was invalidated after the catastrophic collision with a naval cruiser. Records as well as the Titanic's plans have mysteriously disappeared. What really

counts is that lives were lost. Newspapers talk about how Ismay's father had built up the company with his bare hands so to speak.

Equally strong-willed as his son, he had wanted to surpass himself by starting a battle of life and death with his competitors namely Cunard, Hapag and Norddeutscher Lloyd.

Modern liners could transport passengers and mail across the perilous Atlantic in just one week, in unimagined luxury. In 1912, the norm had become five days; six was not acceptable anymore. Nowadays, it only takes five hours by plane. Ismay knew how to manipulate the elite with clever advertising; he had the best commercial artists at his disposal. That's why it is such a tragedy to him to be humiliated to such a degree. Rose finally starts to feel sorry for him. This is not the first time that wealthy Rose de Witt Bukater makes the headlines. Her previous marriage to a well-known actor and her various escapades had been discussed at length. While the ocean tugs are busy trying to berth the Titanic, she is still on the bridge with Lowe. A throng gathers near White Star's New York piers. No tooting, no hooting, no noisy welcome ceremony. All flags are half-mast. Ambulances are waiting. The bodies of those who died have to be unloaded first. Senator William Alden Smith is waiting to get on board; he will preside over the hastily convened Senate Committee. He is keen to start as soon as possible in order to prevent the birth of too many fantasies. When the gangway has been lowered, the senator dashes on board accompanied by Federal Police carrying bundles of subpoenas to be served on Ismay, Andrew, Captain Smith, the deck officers, a few engineers, the lookouts, the helmsman and a few selected passengers including the ones who had been sitting at the Captain's table. They will all have to appear before the Committee and are not allowed to go home.

XXXIII

Waldorf Astoria Hotel: 19 April 1912, exactly seven days after the Titanic's departure from Southampton.

The great hotel's ornate East Room is jam-packed. It contains several long tables with the Senate Committee down one side of the central one with Senator Alden Smith in the middle, and each witness at the narrow end to their left. Reporters were standing round the edges of the room.

The Senator indulges again in asking the most ludicrous questions. The crux of the matter is also this time the fact that Captain Smith had not adhered to a safe speed. In

order to rub it in, the Senator cites Article 16 of the Maritime Law, pretending to be quite familiar with it.

Unfortunately for him, everyone knows that he is an ex-railway man.

God himself could not have improved on the Senator's choice. Molly happens to be his first witness.

“Have you any idea what a safe speed entails, Mrs. Brown?”

Molly jumps up as if her bare bottom had touched a red-hot potbelly stove. She rattles off what Murdoch had taught her. The Senator doesn't appear to be impressed at all; it obviously means that he doesn't know the difference between her definition and a bar of soap.

“In your opinion, Mrs. Brown, did the Titanic cruise along at a safe speed?”

“No, Sir, she didn't.”

“How do you know that, Mrs. Brown?”

“Because I happened to be on the bridge at the time of the collision; the telegraph showed “Full Ahead”.

“Do you perhaps know why?”

“Mr. Bruce wanted to go as fast as possible in order to get out of the danger area; he had already received a number of warnings from other ships about field ice and icebergs.”

“Who is this Mr. Bruce you are referring to, Mrs. Brown?”

“His full name is eh ... J full stop Bruce Ismay, the Chief Executive of the White Star Line.”

Molly is the heroine in all evening newspapers.

The gossiping weeklies concentrate more on her love affair with First Officer William Murdoch, the man who masterminded the head-on collision. It provides an excellent opportunity to come up with the possible reason for the disaster. “She, rather than the iceberg had attracted his attention.”

Either the early morning steward or the helmsman must have been eager to get some extra cash.

Captain Smith is next. A bit like questioning the headmaster after the girl in first class.

Smith looks awful; he seems ten years older. The lines on his ruddy face have deepened. He assumes all responsibility; he didn't have much choice. It's the general, not the king or the queen that will be hanged. The general is dead, long live the general, meaning the next one of course.

“I believe that it was your last voyage before retiring, Captain Smith?”, asks his namesake.

“Correct, Sir.”

“Was that perhaps the reason why you were not so particular about maintaining a safe speed?”

“No, Sir.”

“Why didn’t you slow down? Did Mr. Ismay stop you from doing so?”

Smith avoids giving a direct answer and says, “I perfectly understood his commercial interests. Under normal circumstances, I have no problem with going full speed ahead.”

“Captain Smith, could the circumstances under which the Titanic was speeding along at 22 knots be called normal?”

“Normal in the sense that they were no different from the ones I encountered throughout my long career.”

“Did you receive any warnings about icebergs from other ships?”

“Yes, Sir I did, I pinned them onto the noticeboard on the bridge for my watchofficers to read.”

“Did you notify Mr. Ismay as well?”

“Yes, Sir, I did.”

“Is that still part and parcel of your idea of normal circumstances, Captain?”

“Yes, Sir, it is. Normally, an iceberg can be spotted in time to avoid it. You can ask dozens of my colleagues; they will all confirm what I just said.”

“Captain Smith, I have no intention to do so; this is not just the aftermath of a punch-up in the playground to find out who started it.”

“Where you on the bridge at the time of the collision?”

“No, Sir; a captain is not always on the bridge, he relies on his qualified officers. He will always tell them to call him immediately if in doubt.”

“Did First Officer Murdoch send for you?”

“Yes, Sir, he did; unfortunately, the damage had already been done.”

“Captain Smith, you have just stated that, under normal conditions, it is possible to avoid running into an iceberg. The very fact that you hit it instead, proves to me that EITHER THE CIRCUMSTANCES WERE NOT NORMAL OR YOU WENT MUCH TOO FAST, thank you.”

Molly is on the ball; she immediately picks up the small, but understandable error made by the Senator. She cuddles up to Murdoch and whispers in his ear, "Smith didn't do anything; he wasn't even there. It was you who hit the iceberg."

"No Molly, in fact it was you yourself who hit it," he corrects her equally softly.

The press don't miss a beat; Molly is under close surveillance.

She's the Queenpin of the hearing.

Her challenging and deliberate choice of clothes alone is enough to attract the calculated attention.

She's wearing a long, low-cut dress complete with a large, square collar at the back and a black, v-shaped tie to emphasise her substantial cleavage. It is a female version of what sailors wear on passenger ships or in the Navy. Silk, see-through stockings follow the contours of a minute part of her fleshy calves before disappearing into a pair of black, high-heeled lace-up boots. Her Viennese hairdo is surmounted by a black, broad-rimmed hat adorned with three freshly picked carnations. To stop them from wilting, their stems are covered with wet cotton wool in foil. Those are more or less the details newspapers fill their columns with.

Journalist are always eager to exaggerate or to add a few of their own creations. When Thomas Andrews, Harland and Wolff's managing director and supervisor of the Titanic's design and every detail of her construction appears in the witness box, the hearing becomes extremely boring and beyond the comprehension or interest of most people, especially when he uses models to show how a huge ship like the Titanic responds to her rudder. No wonder Molly yawns politely; she hadn't had much sleep lately.

However, when Murdoch is called to make statements and to answer questions, she's a different woman again.

"Mr. Murdoch, I believe that you were in charge at the time of the collision; is that correct?"

"Yes, Sir, it is."

"According to the order given, you were actually heading for the iceberg instead of trying to avoid it. Is that correct?"

"Yes, Sir, it certainly is."

"Mr. Murdoch, don't you think that your action of running full-tilt at an iceberg was crazy and therefore unforgivable? You killed 15 people! What sort of an officer are you?"

“A qualified one, Sir. Although I understand your reaction, I also know that, as a layman, you cannot possibly compete with the knowledge of ships I have.”

“Under normal circumstances, we do not enter icebergs.” (Laughter)

“In this particular case, the circumstances were not normal, SO I DELIBERATELY RAN INTO IT.”

“Please explain, Mr. Murdoch.”

“Mrs. Brown, your first witness, has read a book.

“A book? How interesting.”

“Yes, Senator, a book written by Morgan Robertson about ten years ago. He describes in great detail how a huge liner scrapes against an iceberg because the captain was unable to avoid it altogether. The hull was ripped open, the liner sank; nobody survived the accident.” “Would I be correct in saying that you based your crazy action on a fairytale, Mr. Murdoch?” “Senator, I advise you to refrain from comments that highlight your incompetence; a ship is not a train running on rails. (Laughter). “Ever since I started my career, I had visions of scraping an iceberg. No matter how thick the plates of the hull, they will be ripped open, at least ... when the ship is going too fast.” Mrs. Brown happened to confirm my theories, that’s all. The author of the book is no doubt an expert; in my eyes that is. As a former Merchant Navy Officer, he was worried by the widespread disregard of the iceberg threat to the ever larger and faster ships of his day. Journalists write feverishly. Murdoch already imagines the headlines, “Murdoch believes in Molly’s fairytales.” They will print how he and she had shared the same pillow to discuss the pros and cons of scraping against an iceberg or hitting one head-on.

XXXIV.

Like the Senator, the Committee is in total disbelief.

The fact that there are 15 casualties weighs heavily. Emotions and technical ignorance have it. All of them are trapped in their on-shore, vertical mode of thinking. They most probably imagined themselves driving along in their brand new T-Ford on a sunny Sunday afternoon, buying ice creams for the kids, oblivious of icebergs. They would avoid oncoming cars, not deliberately run into them. The impact caused by two vehicles going 30 miles each would be deadly. No argument, no matter how cleverly or scientifically thought out would unlock their conditioned and closed minds. It had to be

done by force, the same way the engineers had cut free the survivors in the fore-castle. From “The Psychology of Insanity” by Bernard Hart (Cambridge University Press, 1936): “The power of emotion in the direction of human thought, the impotence of logic to affect the conclusions dictated by passion and prejudice, and the extent to which man’s mind is controlled by psychological processes of which he is himself entirely unconscious, have been so abundantly demonstrated as to become obvious to the most superficial observer.”

Murdoch knew exactly what had to be done.

What the Senator classified as fiction would become fact!

“What was the name of the book you mentioned, Mr. Murdoch? I might as well mention it in my report.”

“FUTILITY, Sir; as a matter of fact, it still is.” (Laughter)

“And what was the name of the ship?”

“TITAN, Sir; I’m glad you said “WAS.” (Mumbling) The Captain went too fast and was unable to avoid it altogether; the rest I told you before, except that 1500 people died instead of the 15 I caused. Since 6 watertight compartments were damaged instead of 2, the ship went down in no time.

In order to prove to you that my action was not crazy but based on wisdom and respect for the lives of both crew and passengers, I seek leave to show you the difference between what would have happened and what did happen. Fortunately, the wreck or rather the three main pieces were only quite recently discovered. As always, a picture will speak a thousand words.

“Go ahead, Mr. Murdoch.”

The Senator, his Committee members and the audience are noticeably impressed and stunned with what they see. Murdoch had obviously made his point.

It had at least become quite clear to all that, under the existing circumstances, Murdoch's decision, no matter how seemingly incongruous, was the best.

What remained to be discussed however, was the speed and the circumstances because the one depends on the other. That’s why the Senator wants to ask Captain Smith a few more questions.

“Captain Smith, I must admit that Mr. Murdoch has changed my mind. What I initially labelled as crazy was in fact life saving. Would you have done the same?”

“Yes, Sir. I take all responsibility.”

“Did you ever discuss a similar action with Mr. Murdoch?”

“No, Sir, it would be unthinkable to formalise such a controversial decision; it can only be made in an extreme emergency.”

“The word “EMERGENCY” INDICATES TO ME THAT THE ICEBERG WAS NOT SPOTTED IN TIME DESPITE THE EXTRA NUMBER OF LOOKOUTS.”

“I do understand what you want to say, Senator. We were not cruising along at a safe speed. As I said before, I didn’t think it necessary.”

“Thank you, Captain Smith.”

Fifth Officer Harold Lowe is next.

“I believe you were also on the bridge at the time of the accident, Mr. Lowe.”

“Yes, Sir, I was, as Mr. Murdoch’s assistant during the second half of the First Watch; from 10 p.m. till midnight to be precise.”

“Apart from the various warnings, would you say that the circumstances were normal when you were on duty?”

“No, Sir, they were not.”

“In which way were they different?”

“It was New Moon. There was no wind; the sea looked like a black marble table top. That’s when the distance to the horizon decreases. The sharp line is gone; the distinction between water and sky is minimal. The slightest degree of humidity causes the horizon to become hazy with the result that any object appears a few miles closer by.”

It only needs a bit of a breeze to eliminate it and to cause the waves to lap against the base of the iceberg; the fluorescent foam of the surf can easily be seen in time. Unfortunately, as I said earlier, there was no wind.”

“Thank you, Mr. Lowe.”

After lunch, it’s Ismay’s turn. His nervous breakdown didn’t last long.

Although he was said to be still hospitalised the day before, paperboys had spotted him visiting his lawyer. He actually looks able to withstand the storm.

“Mr. Ismay, it has come to my notice that you had the habit of calling the Titanic ‘YOUR TITANIC’; isn’t that a bit far fetched?”

“Perhaps to you, Sir, it is. However, I felt as if I was married to her.”

“As if she was your wife?”

“Yes, you could say that.”

Rose raises her eyebrows. Journalists watch her.

“Mr. Ismay, are you only interested in a fast woman? Excuse the unintended pun.”(Laughter).

Ismay shrugs his shoulders rather sheepishly.

“Who runs the ship, the Captain or the owner?”

“The Captain, of course.”

“Only during a hurricane no doubt. In this particular case there seem to have been two Captains.”

“I don’t quite get you, Senator.”

“I am convinced that you didn’t make the Captain feel that he and he alone made the decisions.”

“I suspect that your conviction is only based on hearsay, Senator.”

“Why is it then that you continually checked with him in front of passengers to make sure that the steamcocks were wide open? He himself was reluctant to do so. As a matter of fact, he sabotaged your ruthless eagerness to reach New York with all the pomp you dreamt of; the cocks were never wide open, because he had given the Chief Engineer orders to squeeze them. Since you exerted so much pressure on him, he didn’t want to make it too obvious.

“All I can say is that I didn’t influence the Captain in any way. The query about the cocks being wide open was meant to give passengers the impression that all was well, not to give orders to go as fast as possible.”

Commotion in the room. All eyes are on the six guests who had been sitting at the Captain’s table. Their bewildered faces are self-explanatory. Only then do the minds above these eyes wonder why Captain Smith himself isn’t there any more.

The owners of these minds don’t have to wait long before that curiosity is being satisfied because a messenger appears with a letter for the Senator.

After reading it, he raises his eyebrows, takes off his spectacles, looks visibly shocked at the audience and says,

“It is my uncomfortable duty to inform you that Captain Edward Smith took his life a few minutes ago. I will now read to you his last letter.

“Greetings Ladies, Gentlemen, Senator,

I was so stupid as to obey Mr. Bruce as Mrs. Molly Brown used to call him defiantly. He

allowed me to finish my career as commodore of his magnificent ship. I should have insisted that I was ultimately responsible for the safety of my crew, my passengers and

the Titanic herself. I should have given orders to slow down when warnings about field ice, growlers and icebergs came pouring in. If I had let the Titanic run at a safe speed, I would not have killed 15 of my men. I am to blame. Under the circumstances, First Officer Mr. Murdoch had no other choice but to do what he did; he is innocent. Instead of retiring in shame and living with a guilty conscience, I've decided to bid you farewell." Edward John Smith

P.S. Homo nequissimum omnium qui sunt, qui fuerunt, qui futuri sunt.

Referring to Ismay who was to die in obscurity in London:

Of all the villains who live, lived and will live, he is the greatest.

The courtroom is in uproar. People call out to each other. Reporters run off hastily either to phone or to send telegraphs. Ismay's lawyer leans forward to whisper something into his client's ear, most probably what their next move will be.

Just as Rose is about to leave, Harold Lowe runs up to her, seemingly to wish her all the best.

For the first time in her life, Molly is lost for worlds.

It is almost impossible to restore order. There's tumult and turmoil.

Senator Smith hammers and hammers on the table with his gavel until everyone is quiet again. He suggests that the hearing be postponed, but asks the seven people of the Captain's table to stay behind for the time being.

When Ismay tells his lawyer to stay as well, Rose objects, especially since the Senator has assured them that anything said would be off the record.

All he is interested in is to unify their testimonies, because Captain Smith had already provided him with the necessary material for the final verdict.

Ismay nevertheless stubbornly refuses to oblige because he is adamant that the Captain's very words have stigmatised him. The Senator then turns to the other six to ask them whether they think that

Ismay's argument is a valid one.

Since none of them answers his question, the Senator has no choice but to convene a meeting with Ismay and his lawyer the following day. Their viewpoints will then be included as well.

Outside, newsvendors yell out the new headlines of the latest editions.

**YET ANOTHER TITANIC CASUALTY. CAPTAIN SMITH COMMITS SUICIDE.
CAPTAIN SMITH SHOOTS HIMSELF.**

The papers are of course sold out in no time. Readers swallow the details word for word. The Browning taken out of the Titanic's weapon safe. The shot. The unlocked door of his room in the Waldorf. His headwound. The bloodstains on his pillow. The open letter to the Senator. The closed envelope for his family.

It is found that Smith has a son and a granddaughter; his wife had died a few years earlier.

Reporters in England are quick to trace the son who requests that the letter to the family be sent by mailboat. As was to be expected, newspaper editors delve into the late Captain's past in order to pick and choose the most colourful details for their readers.

XXXV.

In his final report, Senator Smith mentions that he had a lot of respect for the way his namesake took responsibility for his actions and those of his First Officer, albeit towards the end of the hearing.

Time and time again, accidents, disasters and loss of lives are the result of not heeding the definition of a safe speed. It has been worded meticulously. It doesn't allow for any human interpretation fraught with priorities, errors in observation, miscalculations, excuses and the dangers of habit forming because, initially, people form habits, but eventually, the habits form them.

That's why Captain Smith knew quite well that it would have been impossible for him to circum-navigate one of the most crucial articles of the Maritime Law.

Rather than being found guilty, he had the courage to admit his negligence; Ismay's interference, no matter how dominating, could never have counted as an excuse.

His postscript no doubt made the pulling of the trigger much easier. It not only translated his opinion about Ismay, but also an elated anger with himself.

The rest of the world seems to share his last thoughts. Ismay the Great, Ismay the Magnificent, but in the end Ismay the Terrible is compared with the iceberg at the time of the collision: Cold and Black. Nine tenths submerged. Treacherous. Beware!

Since Captain Smith had taken all the blame by stating that under the existing circumstances, he would also have hit the iceberg head-on, Murdoch and Molly can relax as far as feeling guilty is concerned.

However, overzealous reporters want more gossip, more pictures.

The best one is taken on Fifth Avenue, when the couple is walking arm-in-arm past a backdrop of jeweller shops. William is still wearing his uniform; the three gold rings on each sleeve glitter in the sunshine.

In those days, these distinctions made quite an impression. Nowadays, any helmsman of a sightseeing cruiser around Manhattan wears them. Those who sell tickets, only wear a thin one to emphasise the difference in status.

They walk to the hotel where Molly has already booked a luxurious suite, even larger than her sumptuous cabin on the Titanic.

The bellboy doesn't let on that a reporter has secretly given him quite a substantial tip, because the keyholes in those days were like binoculars.

As usual, Molly takes the initiative, turns the key and routinely leaves it in the lock in order to stop newspapers publishing her bare essentials.

She knows quite well that William's head would be like the turbulent water caused by the three gigantic propellers of the Titanic.

So she puts her arms around him and says, "Whether it is the right moment or not, it is imperative that we must now celebrate life; after all we did survive."

A general wants to lose the smallest possible number of men in order to save the majority. A pilot is sent up immediately after a crash. New life must replace death. Amazingly enough, it doesn't take William long to be convinced, especially since he lived so long as a bachelor.

Much like the late Captain Smith piloting his ship through the intricate channels entering New York at full speed, his hands guided by his wishful eyes work overtime to unwrap his Christmas present. It's the only one in the world that never contains a surprise, the only one known to Man that, time and time again, can be wrapped up and unwrapped again and still provide perpetual pleasure despite the fact that it can never replace the first disclosure, the entertainment of which also includes the victory of seduction, nowadays, unfortunately, more and more at a price.

Within minutes, the floor looks like a surrealistic painting of Salvador Dali that could have been called "Streakers at a garage sale".

Presently, in the temple carved in wood, the image of Murdoch stood.

Presently, out of the rainbow of colours in that quasi mythological landscape, the body of a motionless, pale and naked woman appears: The female Molly, Maid Immortal with her desired Valhalla's portal.

Then, like a Nordic God, the male Murdoch approaches her with his already inflated lifeline and, with a mouth-to-mouth embrace, he blows a great divine breath into her lungs until she starts to breathe, breathe, breathe heavily. Finally, they fall asleep, dreaming that they are the first humans on earth. And during that Liebestraum on that Enchanted Evening with Moonlight and Roses, it was then they knew that they would see one another again and again without asking why because only fools give reasons, wise men never try. Instead, Pavarotti the Sailor man sings, “Love me tender, love me sweet, never let me go. You have made my life complete, I love you so.”

XXXVI

The White Star Line is responsible for the families of the fifteen men who lost their lives as a result of the accident caused by proven and admitted negligence. Since they are all European, their bodies will be transported to England. Even the Captain’s son and his granddaughter are included in that responsibility; after all, Smith died for his Company. It also meant that it wouldn’t be too difficult for the son’s lawyer to claim his father’s pension as well. Captain Smith died an honourable man. He did much more than admitting his guilt. When the son finally opens the sealed envelope, the note inside stipulates that everything his father owned be given to the families of the men he indirectly killed. Smith reasoned that they would desperately need the proceeds of the sale of his property as well as the amount in his bank account in order to take Ismay to court. It was yet another dig at his ex-boss. So in the final analysis, he proved to be worthy of his medals.

XXXVII

The Titanic II is under repair in one of the New York shipyards.

Only a skeleton crew is still on board. Most have been transferred to other ships.

It will take about two months to bring the ship back to her original state.

Murdoch stays on to supervise. Molly has given up her suite in the City and has moved back into the cabin she occupied before the accident. The news spreads quickly.

When Head Office queries the situation, Murdoch informs them that Mrs. Brown is still a paying passenger.

The writing is of course on the wall. Despite the fact that Murdoch has been cleared, White Star will never forgive him. Could it perhaps be that the insurance paid out for a total loss would have been far better than the cost incurred with the repairs?

Nobody will answer this devious question.

Murdoch's premonition proved to be right.

A week before the Titanic II is due to sail again, he receives a letter saying that a new captain is on his way and that he himself will have to change ships.

It is early June now. It has been a glorious day except for the Company's insulting letter. Molly and Murdoch have supper. The one steward still on board has become quite helpful; no doubt Molly had given him a handsome sum of money despite the fact that, technically speaking, he is supposed to do his normal duty.

Afterwards they each relax in an elegant and comfortable chaise-longue. Understandably so, supper had gone by without much conversation apart from "pass me the salt please."

Molly knew that William had to chew things over.

This expression is extremely appropriate if one imagines a huge Friesian bull peacefully resting and regurgitating in the middle of the Nullarbor Plain in order to chew its cud. Since not many aborigines speak Latin, it must have been an Italian migrant from Rome who crossed it in his home-made chariot. Unlike the Appian Way in Caesar's day, the trees as well as the crucified slaves were missing.

As a matter of fact, Molly had done the same although in her case it was more like a gentle looking Hereford cow in calf meaning that, as usual, she was about to fire one of her poignant questions. As with the Titanic II, the water had already broken.

"William, so far we've only been making love, rigging conversations at the Captain's table and looking for icebergs; we've never talked about ourselves."

"I suppose there was no need to. I always thought that our intimacy would only last six days at the most, mainly because you seem to have a totally different lifestyle from me."

"Your thoughts must not have been very deep; two months later, we are still together."

"And what about you Molly?"

"Well, I must admit that mine were rather shallow as well. I assumed that you were a married man who was not unwilling to have a little fling on the side. Since most men have an adulterous streak in them when the opportunity presents itself, I had no qualms about it, especially since I instigated it myself."

“However, my assumption must not have been correct, because you don’t seem to be in a hurry to go home to your family.”

“You’re observant as always, Molly; that’s why YOU saw the iceberg first. Your very determination is your Saviour.”

“Did you ever marry, William?”

“Yes, I did. Since I know that it is not the same type of stirring question you used to confront the Guggenheims with, I’ll be more specific, but I don’t want you to feel sorry for me. Promise?”

“It’s a deal!”

“I married when I was Lowe’s age. Our eighteen-months-old daughter died of cystic fibrosis. My young wife died of meningitis not long after. Apart from a few short-term love affairs, I mainly concentrated on my career. I’m an only child. Since my chances of ever becoming captain on one of the White Star ships have decreased greatly, I’ve decided to quit and look for another owner.”

“You don’t have to look far, William.”

“Explain, Molly; I’ve past the stage of doing puzzles.”

“As a matter of fact, this puzzle only needs two pieces. As the prospective owner of an ex- Navy vessel, I represent the first piece; as commander of it, you will hopefully make up the whole puzzle, so it wasn’t so difficult after all. What do you say?”

“The offer is of course very tempting, Molly. However, apart from having some money in the bank for a rainy day, I’m still capable of earning a living.

You’re obviously quite wealthy, otherwise you wouldn’t have made the offer.

The remodelling alone would cost an arm and a leg. Besides, you’re intelligent enough to know that you’ll need many more people to run it.

In no time, they would call me Captain Gigolo.”

Molly burst out laughing.

“William, you men are all the same; in their eyes, women belong in the kitchen cooking dinner, in the laundry doing the ironing, in the shops to buy the groceries, in the bedroom to make the beds, in the rest of the house to do the cleaning.

I didn’t ask you to bludge; all I did was to offer you a new job as Captain of my ship, because I couldn’t possibly run it myself. The fact that I can recite the definition of a safe speed is not enough. I can **entertain** the Captain, I can’t **be** one.”

I’ve always wanted to do something exciting with my money. When my husband died, he left me a fortune that I could never spend in paying rent or buying a house and

keeping alive. I don't want to stay in one place all the time. I want to be like you; going places. The same way you supervise the repairs of Titanic II, you can supervise the necessary alterations. Remember, it's going to be a seaworthy houseboat. I'll pay you the same salary as Captain Smith. You can even put it in the bank if you like. The same way you can stop working for White Star, you can leave me."

"Molly, I'm getting excited. The thought of sailing on the UNSINKABLE MOLLY is enough to accept your offer. However, in order to satisfy my curiosity I'm going to ask you the question that has been on the tip of my tongue for quite a while; it will in no way change our relationship, because I've already decided to love you rather than just to make love to you." Molly is all ears.

"Well, out with it; eventually it would have fallen off anyway."

"Were you ever, eh....." "A Prostitute," continues Molly. "You see, William, you're not the only one whose life wasn't as smooth as a baby's bottom. You got over it; you didn't wind up in the gutter, you went higher up, you even climbed up the iceberg to save others. My father died in a mine explosion, my mother went out to clean people's houses until she became ill, that's when I started to walk the street when I was thirteen. As you said before, my determination is my Saviour. With our positive attitudes, we'll make it. By the way, don't feel sorry for me. Promise?" "It's a deal."

XXXVIII

It takes quite a while before they come across what they want because it is not something you would normally find advertised in the Trading Post: A real U.S. Navy corvette in mint condition and, above all, with rows of rivets The Old Fashioned Way. They are so excited that they forget all about the

official with the papers to be signed. Murdoch remembers his days as a choirboy again and, much to the surprise of the official who had obviously never witnessed such a scene before, he starts to sing what Charles Aznavour would more or less repeat years later, "Just melt against my skin and let me feel your heart. Don't let the world around us win by standing far apart"

Molly responds by lengthening its original name to Horatio Hornblower, thereby combining History and her newly found Don Juan.

It takes even longer to refurbish the by now obsolete vessel.

With looming World War I, they decide to stay out of the warzone and head for the West Coast of South America where they live in relative obscurity at least as the world at large is concerned.

Since Molly never took up knitting and William disliked doing crossword puzzles for the mere sake of killing time, they learn to speak Spanish in order to mix with the simply living locals surviving on a sense of good humour and intricate dishes of rice and fish. Most of them think that the new Messiah and His Wife have come down to make their acquaintance. The couple visit the ancient ruins of Machu Pichu and even establish a small settlement on Easter Island, always making sure that the crew never gets bored or dissatisfied.

Strange as it may seem, it is precisely there, amongst the grotesque figures either standing or toppled over, that William thinks of graveyards and eventually of the statue erected in honour of the late Captain Smith who had in fact been the victim of his own ego as well as of the dubious business ethics of Morgan whose wealth and power suited the ego of Ismay who wanted to win the Blue Ribband, the much coveted prize of the fastest trans-Atlantic crossing that had been Cunard's for so long. It is then that William, instead of feeling sympathy for his one-time superior, feels a renewed gratitude. After all, Smith had lifted a heavy burden off his shoulder by admitting full responsibility for the disaster. From that moment, he nurtures the idea of going to Hanley in Staffordshire where Smith was born in order to show an outer manifestation of an inner feeling. There is always a specific time attached to commemorating an important event; sometimes every year like Christmas, Easter, New Year's Eve, Anzac Day, anything from death to freedom and independence. Murdoch opts for ten years, so the first thing he intends doing is to make contact again with Lowe and possibly the Guggenheims as well because he wants to make the visit in the company of those who, for such a short time, were so deeply involved with one another.

After the war, he learns that Lowe has even become, what he himself never achieved, Captain of the repaired Titanic, but not only that, he is still with Rose.

The Olympic had an adventurous First World War as a troop-ship in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, evading air attacks and submarine attacks but ramming and sinking a U-boat in 1918, something that the Lusitania also tried to do, but failed.

Lightoller, a Royal Navy Reserve and skipper of a destroyer emphasised the definition of his vessel by doing the same. Amazingly enough, Lowe was with him.

There is still a year left before the important rendez-vous so they decide to sail to the Mediterranean. Although neither Molly nor William subscribe to any religious denomination, a liking for the unusual shapes their itinerary. While browsing through an almost ancient biblical bookshop in Jerusalem, they find a map showing the four missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. Instead of picking places higgledy-piggledy, it instantly provides them with an organised schedule to follow. Via Cyprus, Crete, Greece, Melita (the ancient name of Malta), Sicily to Rome where they do as the Romans do.

After taking in the various variations on the theme of life, they visit another place that not IS but WAS: Pompei. Molly, much to her surprise, discovers that her previous teahouse in August Moon profession was practised long before she was born. Like the menu of a European restaurant displayed on the outside wall, a pictorial of the various postures to select from appears above each cubicle. It's the forerunner of the erotic advertisements in the Sydney Morning Herald and the more explicit ones in the magazines sold in service stations in view of, but to be kept out of reach of kids. Finally, on the Isle of Capri, beneath the shade of an old walnut tree, they make the necessary preparations for the visit to England. Una Paloma Blanca brings them the message that the Titanic has settled into a regular routine, leaving New York on a Saturday for the return leg. Since the Guggenheims are excited about Murdoch's reunion plan, the Horatio will sail across La Mer in order to pick them up at Cherbourg at the same time the Titanic arrives.

XL

The sea is like a mirror. Then, above its edge appear four lit-up funnels between two masts. Not long after, a Milky Way of portholes. The New Titanic in all her splendour is on her way.

Cherbourg, a much smaller port than Southampton, is unable to take large liners which therefore have to drop anchor outside the harbour and await service by the two purpose-built tenders, segregated by class. The Nomadic for carrying first and second class, the Traffic for third.

Like a medieval castle towering above all that is near, including the Horatio, the Leviathan comes to rest with the thundering sound of a thousand rattlesnakes.

Like an early morning bazaar in Algiers, a concert of voices takes over in response to the noisy chain. Motorboats with police, custom officers and agents as well as dinghies with preying pedlars go hither and thither. Gradually, daylight comes, so the French passengers want to go home. When Molly and William strain their necks to look up, they notice, the size of fluttering butterflies, five waving hands, because the Guggenheims and Leontine had come on board a little earlier. In an emotional scene with free flowing tears symbolising the free flowing champagne that will follow, seven people relive in only a few seconds their common tragedy in which the head of their table took his life.

THE END

EPILOGUE

14 April 2012. Caitlin Kennedy and Dirk den Helder, presently eighty years old, are standing on the promenade deck of “their” NEW TITANIC which, during her maiden voyage, has her steamcocks closed and her engines stopped at THE SPOT where the old one went down.

The replica was the direct result of launching **their** novel and **their** film entitled “Titanic 100 Years”. Filmmakers and shipbuilders had worked together in order to streamline the total project because efficiency was paramount.

Thanks to the endeavours of an international travel agency, the cabins for a thousand passengers had already been booked three years in advance which meant that the total cost of the combined product was already cut in half well before it was completed.

It shouldn't come as a surprise either that there were more than enough enthusiasts wanting to be on the ship during the trip, despite the fact that 50,000 Euro was charged for the privilege.

People who never believed in fairy tales will now have to modify their belief.

Apart from the NEW TITANIC, Bob Ballard's mothership will also be there in the Atlantic Ocean at 41° 46'N, 50°14'W to be precise. Her crew will descend four kilometres into its dark depth to drape an enormous ribbon with 1912-2012 over the one hundred year old wreck.

Television screens aboard the NEW TITANIC, in the great hall of Hollywood where the film premiere will take place, and in every household, will present this unbelievable spectacle in minute detail.

And if that is not enough, there will even be a real iceberg!

If the Dutch are capable of salvaging a Russian submarine resting on the bottom of the icy Barents Sea - named after the Dutchman Willem Barents who, in 1590, tried to establish a new route to Indonesia via the North Pole - then the job of towing icebergs wherever needed is a cinch.

As a matter of fact, a company on one of the Dutch islands in the North-Terschelling, a real tongue twister for English speaking people - will make sure that, thirty times per year during the fifty years following the maiden voyage, the **NEW TITANIC** will meet one on her way to New York. To successfully do the task, the said company will have a permanent base on Newfoundland.

During the ten years prior to this complex undertaking, Joop van den Ende had produced yet another musical, this time based on “Titanic 100 Years”. Like the

American one, it had successfully attracted a world-wide audience as well as umpteen Oscars. In the final scene, Captain Smith appears on stage, all the way from Heaven.

The ex-Commodore, sitting on top of a woolly, silver-lined cumulous cloud, addresses his tableau de la troupe.

He predicts that on **14 April 2037**, after the NEW TITANIC has been in service for twenty-five years, **something extraordinary will happen.**

Between 2002 and 2012, an annual exhibition was organised to which people from all over the world contributed. Their artistic displays were expressed in an endless number of ways. The exhibition, formally opened in Rotterdam, was soon afterwards held in the Guggenheim museums at New York, Bilbao, Paris and Venice. Even Berlin, London and Tokyo followed suit.

Queen Maxima of the Netherlands and her husband Willem Alexander are among the special guests who make the maiden voyage. It pleases her to honour Caitlin Kennedy and Dirk den Helder for their almost super-human efforts. A newly proclaimed distinction complements the equivalent of the O.B.E. already bestowed on them years before. **14 April 2037.** After a probation period of seventy-five years, the oldest well-known, still engaged Dutch couple - Caitlin had been naturalised in the meantime - decides to get married on THE SPOT at a very special moment in History, because the wedding ceremony coincides with the sinking, this time planned, of the once luxurious liner. They had managed to stop the OLD LADY from going to the wrecking yard.

The ship had been written off ten years earlier and subsequently sold to a company that sailed her under the Libyan flag to Tahiti and Rangitoto. Since the harbour of Terschelling was continuously booked out owing to the fact that the tiny island had become internationally renowned because of its "Bring in the Icebergs" company, the once famous Lady had to drop anchor between the treacherous sandbanks outside.

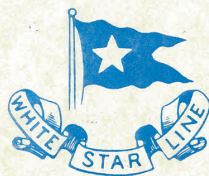
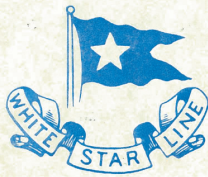
On this awesome occasion, the Ballard-divers, armed with television cameras, accompany her. The technique to do this is extremely difficult and complicated because they have to withstand pressures of up to 400 bar. Furthermore, the four funnels must remain in place, while the ship itself must not break in two.

Lo and Behold! They succeed! A miracle has come to pass without interference of the Organising Source.

This extraordinary achievement matches the building of the Giza Pyramids, or much later that of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

The Legend of the Atlantic, even more incredible than that of Atlantis, will satisfy the curiosity of an even greater number of entertainment addicted readers and viewers around the globe.

Original Menu



R.M.S. "TITANIC"

APRIL 14 1912

Hors D'oeuvre Varies
OYSTERS

CONSOMME OLGA CREAM OF BARLEY
SALMON, MOUSSELINE SAUCE, CUCUMBER

FILET MIGNONS LILI
SAUTE' OF CHICKEN LYONNAISE
VEGETABLE MARROW- FARCI

LAMB - MINT SAUCE
ROAST DUCKLING - APPLE SAUCE
SIRLOIN OF BEEF, CHATEAU POTATOES
GREEN PEAS - CREAMED CARROTS
BOILED RICE
PARMENTIER & BOILED NEW POTATOES

PUNCH ROMAINE

ROAST SQUAB & CRES
COLD ASPARAGUS, VINAIGRETTE
PATE' de FOI GRAS

WALDORF PUDDING
PEACHES IN CHARTREUSE JELLY
CHOCOLATE & VANILLA ECLAIRS

FRENCH ICE CREAM

Replica of actual menu.



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Sydney AUSTRALIA

2012 TITANIC
One Hundred Years

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