

NOTES FROM THE AUTHOR

This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real locales are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

After much thought and deliberation, I have decided, wherever possible, that chapters set in the USA and characters who are American will use American expressions and spellings (i.e. gasoline, gray & color), but chapters set in, and with characters from the United Kingdom will use British expressions and spellings (i.e. petrol, grey & colour). Being Canadian, I wanted to accommodate all my readers on both sides of The Pond.
Thank you for your understanding.

APRIL 1, 1982

CHAPTER 1

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(dit dit dit daab daab daab dit dit dit!)

Then the radio went dead. Three dots, three dashes, three dots: Morse Code for SOS, the international distress call. Searchlights sliced frantically through the darkness of the North Atlantic, looking for the sinking ship. Nothing. Captain Sadler frowned as he peered through his binoculars into the night. The waxing crescent moon carved through the clouds of the windless night. The Atlantic water was unusually still: not a ripple, as smooth as polished glass.

He looked to the starboard side. On a frigid night like tonight, the seaman wished he were anywhere else but standing outside the bridge blasted by the cold sea air as they patrolled.

"Still no sign of life," the lookout called, his breath billowing into the frosty air.

Sadler glanced over to James, the port lookout, who announced, "Nothing on port side."

Sadler cursed under his breath. If this was an April Fool's joke, then he was not amused. Emergencies at sea were serious matters, especially in this region. The harsh North Atlantic Ocean could be cruel and powerful, demanding of mankind's respect, and merciless against human ignorance.

Less than a month and a half ago, The Ocean Ranger off-shore drilling unit had incurred the wrath of the ocean's storms and sank off the coast of Newfoundland, resulting in the deaths of eighty-four rig workers. Captain Sadler's ship, the HMS *McKinley*, had been investigating a possible illegal whaling ship and couldn't reach The Ocean Ranger soon enough. This time, however, they were close. The *McKinley* had quickly arrived at the co-ordinates

given in a previous message: Latitude: 41° 46' North and Longitude: 50° 14' West.

He turned to the Lieutenant, "Any sign of a ship?"

"Nothing on the radar, sir," replied the Lieutenant, never taking his eyes off the green glowing radar screen.

The GIUK listening line had first picked up the call at 00:05 hundred hours. The Greenland, Iceland, United Kingdom (GIUK) line's purpose was to detect any Soviet submarines trying to pass through the North Atlantic. Captain Sadler sighed as he looked at his watch. He was about to give the order to turn about when a voice in the darkness called out sharply: "Man overboard! Man overboard! Off the starboard bow!"

"All ahead slow!" roared Sadler, then picked up the microphone and barked into it, "Rescue Stations!"

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Able Seaman Donaldson had been at the ready in his neoprene wetsuit, prepared to dive into the icy waters for a search and rescue.

His seaboat was lowered into the ocean and bounced across the surface, speeding towards the solitary body of a woman floating on what appeared to be an old fashioned wooden deck chair. He was disappointed that there was only one possible survivor to retrieve. The chance of survival was slim in these conditions. No one could survive these icy waters for any length of time, especially sprawled out the way she was. Donaldson had been trained to survive in extreme climates. He knew how to prevent hypothermia by keeping his limbs tucked in and as close to his chest as possible. Most civilians panic and try treading water or swimming to keep their limbs moving, thinking the movement would keep them warm. The exact opposite was true: the movement pumps warm blood to the limbs, where it cools quickly, cutting survival by fifty percent. Swimming can also cause debilitating cramps, not to mention uncontrollable shivering.

Though he knew it was pointless, Donaldson plunged himself into the water as the boat neared the woman. In the winter moonlight, this victim had an eerie, almost ghostlike, appearance. She clenched a soggy teddy bear in one hand and a book of some sort in the other. The diver turned the woman's face towards him. Her dark wet hair, framing her lovely face, contrasted sharply against her alabaster skin. She appeared to be dead. Donaldson had encountered death at sea before but it never got...

She suddenly gasped for air, nearly shocking Donaldson out of his wetsuit.

"She's breathing!" he hollered, and frantically tried to place the Kisbie ring around the woman. He soon discovered it would be no simple task, as she was wearing a cumbersome, multi-layered dress. Donaldson tried to remove the bear and the book from the woman's grasp, but her fingers would not

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loosen. He gave up quickly. It was more urgent to get her out of the biting water. The three other crewmen in the seaboat helped to hoist the woman out of the frigid ocean. With every second counting, Donaldson wasted no time by getting into the boat himself. He grabbed the wooden deck chair in one hand and the side of the seaboat with the other, and called out "Let's go!" to the crewmen behind the wheel.

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The night was bitingly cold despite the many layers he was wearing; Sadler could feel the wind created by the moving ship ripping through him and rattling his bones. With a renewed admiration for the lookouts, he tried not to blink as his eyelashes seemed to freeze together, and he felt icicles forming on his greying moustache. He could hear them crunch in his eyebrows as he scowled while the mysterious woman was hoisted on-board. Sadler was hoping that the discovery of this survivor would bring answers to some questions, but her surprising attire and her unconscious state only served to deepen the mystery.

Even as she fell upon the deck, her vice-like fists did not relax to drop their contents. It was as if rigor mortis was setting in.

"Quick, get her below to sickbay!"

"Aye sir," responded two crewmen as they hauled her out of the night air. Sadler turned to Ordinary Seaman Cartier, one of the few female crewmembers on board, who was stamping her feet on the deck to keep warm. Sadler signaled for her to follow. "Get her into dry clothes as quickly as possible!"

"Aye sir."

As the HMS *McKinley* sailed onward, its searchlights continued to scan the ocean. There *had* to be a ship nearby. The woman couldn't have been in the icy waters for long and had to have come from somewhere. Sadler had already given the order to commence a grid search from this point to try to locate the ship, or any other survivors. He looked at the beech wood folding deck chair that had acted as her floatation device. He recognized the style — his grandfather had had the same design on his yacht. Sadler bent down to take a closer look at the mark emblazoned onto the headboard. A five-point star was carved perfectly into the wood. There was something familiar about it. Suddenly a voice called from the bridge.

"I'm picking something up on the radar, sir!"

"A ship?" Sadler hoped.

"No, sir."

Before the Lieutenant could respond, Sadler already knew the answer. Suddenly he could see it, glowing in the night.

"Iceberg! Dead ahead, sir!"

"Sound the collision alarm!" cried out Sadler as he raced back into the bridge.

The familiar cry of the action alarm pierced the night air, spurring the crew to the ready. From the bosun's mate station, the officer grabbed the microphone and roared, "All hands brace for impact! All hands brace for impact!"

As his crew readied themselves, Sadler needed to quickly decide the best course of action. Starboard or Port? What were the better odds?

He flicked the switch to keep the microphone active while he barked the evasive maneuvers, "Hard to starboard!"

"Hard to starboard!" echoed the voice of the helmsman, who was two decks below closer to the stern of the ship.

"Starboard engine back *full!*"

"Starboard engine back full!" repeated Helm. Sadler detected a hint of nervousness in the helmsman's voice. The use of the word 'full' for engines was only used in a state of emergency. The helmsman was in a windowless room away from the bridge with only a compass and two engine repeaters. He had no way of knowing what lay before them. This odd placement is traced back to the old wartime days when the possibility of ramming an enemy ship might have been necessary. The Helm Officer might have been less likely to follow such an order if he could see what the bridge saw; hence Helm was stationed where it was.

"Wheel hard to starboard, starboard engine back full, sir," stated Helm.

Sadler's eyes were drawn to the ghostly specter looming before them. It was a very large pinnacle iceberg.

"Wheel hard to starboard," Helm began to repeat. "Starboard engine..."

"Very good," huffed Sadler curtly. Even though Sadler already knew from the compass and seeing the arrow on the engine repeater settings, the Helmsman was following standard protocol. Sadler, who was in no mood for pleasantries, held his breath as he could feel the ship struggling against inertia to slow down and turn. The Lieutenant and two other officers rushed over to the port wing to gauge their status.

As his hands gripped the rail in front of the console, Sadler realized he was unconsciously sucking in his gut, as he did in his youth as he tried to squeeze through a broken fence to a scrap yard, as if he were willing the ship's girth to do the same as it edged past the enormous glacial menace.

The Lieutenant turned back to Sadler and with a nod called out, "All clear."

Everyone on the bridge sighed collectively as the ship moved past the icy monolith, unscathed. The Action Alarm was turned off.

"Midships, both engines ahead slow," ordered the Captain.

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"Midships, both engines ahead slow," echoed the voice of the Helm Officer. Sadler awaited the confirmation that they were now putting the ship back on course. "Rudder amidships, both engines ahead slow, sir."

"Very good," replied Sadler into the microphone, his eyes still drawn to the iceberg that caught them all off guard. Sadler scowled. *How did it suddenly appear out of nowhere?* His eyes drifted to the lookouts. They were not looking at him but rather continuing to scan the sea for any further sign of danger. He couldn't blame them for missing it. Over a dozen crewmembers, including himself, had been staring into the endless horizon looking out for a ship in distress. It might have been a windless night, making the sea a flat calm, but despite the absence of waves breaking on icebergs to aid the visual, the radar should have picked up the iceberg before it was upon them. Strange.

As they moved safely away from the iceberg, Sadler needed some answers. Any answers. "Lieutenant, you have the bridge."

The captain's boots echoed on the metal ladder as he descended below deck. In sickbay, the mysterious woman had been stripped of the multiple layers of clothing and was covered by warm blankets and hot water bottles. A stocking cap had been put on her head to retain her body temperature. Her odd costume was dripping from a hook on the nearby bulkhead, the waterlogged teddy bear she had gripped so tightly was resting in a metal bedpan, and the soggy book lay on the table nearby.

"How is our patient?" asked Sadler as he neared the woman.

The ship's doctor didn't look up as he shone a light into the woman's sapphire blue eyes, "She's suffered stage-three hypothermia. Her body temperature was so low that I can only assume that her cellular metabolic process had shut down."

"In layman's terms, please." Sadler asked.

The doctor peered over his glasses at Sadler, "I'm sorry, Sir. At that point internal organs usually fail. I can't be sure if she'll ever regain consciousness."

After all this, they still might lose their only survivor. Sadler couldn't bear to think about it. Sadler turned his attention to Cartier who was still trying to wring the water out of the woman's cumbersome underdress. "Did you find any I.D.?"

"Not quite, Sir. But she was wearing this," Cartier said as she handed Sadler a gold locket on a chain. Sadler held the locket up to the light to examine it closely. It was quite elegant. On the back was an ornate inscription. Sadler tilted it past the light to make the engraving more legible,

*To Myra,
Happy Anniversary!
Archie
December 31.*

Myra? Was this woman Myra? Sadler looked again at the locket. As he hoped, there was a small hinge on the one side. He tried to open it. It was stuck. He reached into the pocket of his trousers, taking out his pocketknife. He flicked it open and then proceeded to carefully pry the tip of the blade along the seam. He felt himself sigh in relief as it popped open. Setting the knife down, he parted the two halves delicately. There he saw two pictures inside: one was of a young man with the mysterious woman—presumably Myra—dressed in turn-of-the-century costumes. The other photo was of a small baby boy dressed in a cheesy old-fashioned navy suit. Both photos had a sepia tone to them—*no doubt created at some novelty booth at a carnival*, he thought.

"And Captain, there might also be something here," Cartier said, pointing to the book on the nearby table. "Looks like a piece of paper used as a makeshift bookmark."

Sadler set the locket down carefully as Cartier held the small hardcover up for him to see. It looked antiquated, like the kind found in old used bookstores. Quite small in size, on first glance it appeared to be about five or six inches by eight inches and quite thin. The grey cloth cover was water damaged but as Cartier gingerly opened the book, Sadler could make out the single title on the spine: *Futility*.

Futility? The title was somehow oddly familiar to Sadler, but he could not recollect having read it. Cartier carefully pried the pages open to the marked section. The wet mysterious bookmark was stuck into the page. Cartier gently set the book down as she looked about and then grabbed the tweezers from the nearby metal pan. She carefully began to pry up a corner. Sadler was getting impatient but he could see that Cartier had to move ever-so-slowly so as not to rip it.

She turned it over and gingerly unfolded it, carefully smoothed it out and moved it into the light to take a look. A confused frown crossed her brow. She looked up at Captain Sadler, opened her mouth as if to say something, then looked back down at the paper and continued to stare at it, as if waiting for something to happen.

"Well? What is it?"

Cartier said nothing, but backed away so Sadler could inspect the piece of paper. Sadler recognized it immediately; it was an old style ticket for a steamship. In curved text at the top were the bold letters:

WHITE STAR LINE

That was where Sadler had seen that five-point star. It was the old logo of the prominent British shipping company. This was a 'Cabin Passenger's

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Contract Ticket', which meant 'First Class' but the names that were written in ink were smudged by water damage. He could barely make out: "A__G."

Beneath the illustrated image of a four-funneled 'Cunard Class' Steamer was the name of the passenger ship typed in bold letters. Captain Sadler felt an odd chill as he read the impossible:

British Steamship: R.M.S. TITANIC

CHAPTER 2

Callum Toughill looked at his wristwatch as he sat in the uncomfortable chair outside of Percy Winthrop's office. Quarter to nine. Mr. Winthrop was uncharacteristically late to his own meeting. As one of the senior brokers at the head office of Lloyd's of London, Winthrop was always very punctual.

"Can I get you a tea while you wait?" asked Mr. Winthrop's new assistant. Callum had met her only once before and was now too embarrassed to ask her name again. She then corrected herself, "No wait... you prefer coffee, correct?"

Callum smiled as he waved his hand dismissively. "No, thank you. I've had too much already."

"Now then, I'll be *gain-hand*... nearby, if you change your mind," she said with a smile as she sat back down behind her typewriter. Callum noticed that her accent had strong traces of Yorkshire in it. Callum smiled back. He hated lying to her but he didn't have the heart to tell her that he didn't like the coffee at the Lloyd's head office. This was ironic considering that Lloyd's of London began in the 1700's as a coffee house catering to sailors, merchants and ship owners. To make ends meet, the founding Lloyd would set up business meetings and keep up on the latest shipping news. Now the insurance and brokering company not only had offices all over the world but their head office was overcrowded and designs for a new head office down the street were being reviewed.

Callum rose from the back-numbing guest chair as he looked at his watch again. He hated to sit still and started to pace about the underwriter's bullpen's puke-green carpet. He smirked. He hoped that Winthrop would update the new building's décor. Its 1960's styling was twenty years out of date. *Hope they get rid of that ship too*, he thought as he looked at the framed

picture of the *Titanic* sinking. Callum winced at the sight. Like hanging a horseshoe upside down, surely it must be bad luck to have a sinking ship on display. Still, as a freelance investigator Callum understood why Winthrop wanted it there. It was a little-known fact that in 1912, a New York client sent a desperate telegraph in the middle of the night to a broker here in London to insure the RMS *Titanic* for £1 million. Respecting the urgency of an established client, the request was processed quickly. Later the next day, that broker learned that the *Titanic* had perished and that the insurance request was made as it was sinking. The portrait was there as a reminder of their folly. Callum remembered that whenever something out of the ordinary came into the office, Percy Winthrop always reminded his brokers to '*look for icebergs.*'

As he continued to pace, Callum Toughill caught his reflection in the mirror near the coat rack. He grimaced. *Time for another haircut.* He liked it shaved military-style. He was still in good shape for a man in his forties, and liked wearing fitted tailored suits to show off that fact just enough. The whole appearance made him look intimidating to the people he was investigating, but deep down he took extra pride in having come a long way from the mining town in Scotland where he'd grown up. He had all but lost the brogue in his accent. Unless he got angry. Or drunk.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, mate," Percy said in his familiar Northern Irish accent as he entered the bullpen briskly. Percy Winthrop was one of the few men who could wear a bow tie on a regular basis and not look like a dolt. As usual his suits were as grey as his demeanor. Callum grabbed his briefcase from the floor next to the uncomfortable chair and followed Winthrop into his office. As he dropped some papers next to the ashtray on his desk, Winthrop grumbled, "Things have been chaotic around here."

"Don't fret it, Mr. Winthrop," Callum said as he held out a file folder.

"What's that?" Winthrop asked.

"My preliminaries on the Bolshar art claim," replied Callum. Then, noticing the confusion in Winthrop's face he quickly asked, "Isn't that why you called me in this morning?"

"My apologies," huffed Winthrop. "I had no time to go into details over the phone. I need to pull you off that case."

"Have I done something wrong?"

"Good heavens, no!" retorted Winthrop. "You're one of the best investigators I know... which is why I need to reassign you to another case."

"What of the Bolshar art claim?"

"Someone else can take over. Have a seat, Callum." Winthrop gestured to the chair across from his desk. "Can I offer you some coffee?"

"No!" Callum paused and cleared his throat. "No, thank you. I'm eager to know about this new case."

Winthrop peered over his glasses at Callum, then took out a handkerchief and began polishing them as he spoke. It was a nervous habit that Callum had

observed over the years. It was something Winthrope did when he was trying to choose his words carefully.

"Have you heard of the murder of..." Winthrope paused. *Was it nerves or dramatic effect?* Winthrope put on his glasses before he continued, "The murder of Agatha Gilcrest?"

Callum arched his back and felt the muscles tighten in his jaw. He needed to be sure he heard correctly. "Did you say Agatha Gilcrest?"

Winthrope nodded.

"As in the old woman murdered in Scotland seventy-five years ago?"

"Precisely."

Did he know about it? He knew of the case but it was forbidden to utter the name 'Agatha Gilcrest' in Toughill's home. The case was the very reason Callum Toughill was unable to pursue his true dream of becoming a police officer like his grandfather who had been a police detective at the time of the murder. He was later disgraced and forced to resign.

Once, as a young boy, Callum could see that his grandfather was miserable and asked about it. The usually cheery old man became cross and snarled, "*Not something I care to discuss in this lifetime, I shall take the burden to my grave.*" And that was the end of the discussion. It was a moment Callum never forgot, and he never dared to mention it again.

When Callum announced that he was going to pursue a career in law enforcement, his grandfather forbade it. All of his relatives, even ones he only saw at baptisms and funerals, felt the need to contact him and chastise him for opening such horrible wounds in his dear, sweet 'granda'.

Callum eventually relented, but not because of family pressure. He would have gladly proven them wrong; however, when the 'truth' of the past reared its hideous fangs, along with the sneers of his would-be superior officers, Callum came to a sobering realization. It was clear the police force he so wanted to join was not going to be fair. The sins of the father are inherited by the sons. Being an insurance investigator was the closest vocation he could find without carrying a badge that would be forever tarnished through no fault of his own.

"Yes I know of it," sighed Callum.

"Forgive me," replied Winthrope. "It was a rhetorical question. I'm well aware of your family's history.... And your grandfather... Jack?"

"John. My grandfather John," added Callum dryly. He then leaned in. "What is it about this case that interests you?"

"The infamous brooch that was stolen," Winthrope said as he retrieved a photo from a nearby folder and held it up for Callum to see. It was a crescent-shaped silver brooch with twenty-two diamonds. Some were notably large ones at the thickest curve of the jewelry. It was elegant and stunning. Winthrope continued, "As you know it was never recovered."

Callum nodded.

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"What you don't know is that it may have been on the *Titanic* when it sank."

Callum looked at Winthrope with confusion. He knew Winthrope had a mild... no, *severe* obsession with the *Titanic*, but this seemed preposterous.

"Are you serious?"

"Very much so."

"And how do we come to this revelation seventy-odd years after the fact?"

"We, here at Lloyd's, have been privy to the possibility for some time," Winthrope said as his hand patted the thick file folder. "Some years ago, a lost claim turned up with an original date of 1912 and a description of this very brooch. The name on the slip was smeared with water and we were never able to make it out."

"Why does Lloyd's care about it now after all these years?"

"As we speak, there is a court battle raging on over the salvage rights for the wreck of the *Lusitania*. We have received word that Dr. Ballard, a renowned oceanographer, has received more funding and the support of several countries to locate the wreck of the *Titanic*. We need to ascertain if that brooch really was on the *Titanic* and how it got there. This may even help prove your grandfather's case."

Callum sighed. Any clues were long gone. The trail was cold... seventy-five years cold. He had little reason to believe this would work. "Aw Percy, I wouldn't know where to start."

"You can start by reading through this file. Look for icebergs."