

The year was 1912. 5 years since the fire burned down my home, killing my family in the process. Ever since then I had been living in doorways and snatching food from the market stalls when nobody was looking. When people passed me in the road, which was not all that common because people normally crossed to the other side, they'd wrinkle their noses in disgust. I didn't blame them to be honest since my once blond hair had become the colour of soot; my hands and feet were filthy, and my old too-small clothes were covered in stains. I worked at the shipyard, disguised as a boy, my hair tucked up under an old, moth eaten cap.

I unloaded the luggage when ships came in and reloaded them when they were ready to leave. I got paid very little only a tuppence a day, but I was saving up to go to America. I'd been working there ever since the fire, but still didn't have enough. It didn't matter though because I had decided to hide in the luggage on the next boat to America. It was dangerous, but I was willing to do anything to get away from England.

The boat was called the Titanic. I carefully mapped out the plan: load the luggage as usual and on the final load hide behind one of the massive luggage shelves. I took an old sack and filled it with all the food I could steal, beg and find in other people's kitchens! My street mates gave me all that they could and wished me luck. It was hard to look at the faces of the other kids I had grown to love and know that I'd probably never see them again. We were a family. People didn't understand that but families come in all shapes and sizes. They helped cover for me as I went to the market and gathered the few possessions I had. My greatest treasure was a necklace my mother gave to me for my birthday a few days before the fire. It had my name written in colourful glass beads and silver threads. I was surprised that it hadn't been stolen, for it would bring a hefty sum, though I hid it in the rim of my cap, tucking inside the ripped fabric. I had a special wild strawberry plant that had been with me for a few years and didn't really do much except give a sour little fruit once a year but it was a treasure. I held Gracie my best friend tightly and whispered to her... look after Mr. Pip (yes, it was a silly name but I always used to name the things around me making them part of my home).

A couple of the lads who were hauling the luggage with me covered me as I shoved my bag into the top of a crate, then we set off up the gang plank and down the stairs into the bowels of the ship. The lighting got worse the deeper we went but we were used to that. On some ships we had to feel our way since we weren't worth giving light to it seemed. I shook hands with the lads since they still hadn't realised I was a girl after all the time we'd worked together. Well, I stank like a boy I suppose! They took off pretty quickly after some jokes about me blending in with the rats. I smiled but I was so nervous that it must have seemed more like a grimace.

I had planned where I would hide but it wasn't that easy after all. The shelves had been blocked with so much fancy luggage, hat boxes, trunks, even big pot plants (which made no sense to me since they'd die down there). Anyway, everything was wedged in tightly and I started to look around for a new place to hide. I heard voices in the passage outside the luggage room. There were loads of rooms down here, more like little compartments. A gruff voice snarled out to someone "not in there! That box has to go into the New York room. Nothing will be taken out of there until they dock. Put the trunks in here so the maids can come down and collect the stuff later! Come on, get on with it!". I peeked around the corner and watched as a boy, doubled over with the weight of a huge packing carton, struggled into a compartment with "New York Room" etched into the wood above the doorway. The pair of them took off back down the corridor and up the stairs and I darted as fast as I could into the small, dark New York Room. The boxes were jammed quite well in but I managed to climb up and make a little nest at the back on top of one of the boxes. Nobody could see me up high and back here but I'd be safe and hopefully up out of the reach of most of the rats once they

started to roam about. There were always rats and I was pretty sure this new boat would be no different.

The growler came back quite quickly, I'd only just managed to find some blankets out of one of the boxes and pad out my place a bit. I could see the door through a little gap between the boxes and felt sorry for the poor lad who was again being yelled at and was struggling to fit a box into the opening of the room. The boss slapped him across the back of the head, sending him speeding off down the passage. Two bony hands heaved the box in and shut the door. I heard a key in the lock and sighed with relief. Not a second later but my sigh had turned into a lump of panic in my throat. I scrunched up my eyes to try and see the door, but I couldn't since it was pretty much pitch black in there now. I didn't need to see anyway; I had heard well enough that I was locked in. Part of me felt safe and part felt claustrophobic, hemmed in up high and locked up. It was going to take a long time for me to feel like this was home and I'd have to find a way out once we were at sea or I'd starve to death but I managed, slowly, to calm myself down. I was safe. I was safe. I was safe at last.

I woke up with a shiver, it was so cold. I fiddled around to find my blankets before I realised that I wasn't in the digs cuddled up with Gracie. My head was kind of swimming and I felt strange, then I realised that I was tipping back and forth. My head was clear again, it had only taken a moment. We were at sea! This was the feeling of the boat rocking. We were at sea! I had made it. My mind started rejoicing in the darkness and making me giggle as sea shanties came to mind and I pictured myself swinging from the masts of the ship. I knew it was all so stupid since it wasn't that kind of ship but I was almost drunk with joy. Drunk! I didn't know how long I'd been asleep. I had been just exhausted before getting on the ship since it had taken two days without sleep to gather the food I had. I realised that this swirling feeling in my head might well have been because I was so thirsty. So, I fumbled around in my sack and pulled out the flask I had swiped from Mrs Baker's kitchen window sill. I toasted her health in the darkness and drank a few gulps, making myself stop before I was nearly ready since I only had this one flask. But! I had some tomatoes! I foraged again in the sack and soon felt the squishy items. OK, so they weren't as fresh as they could be but they'd be juicier for it! So I ate them as quickly as I could so as to avoid actually tasting them, then settled back for a bit more of a snooze. I had relaxed, I reached a hand up to the ceiling and felt the strength of the wood above me. I imagined all the thousands of people who were walking, sleeping, dancing, playing and living above me. I was one of them. I was part of it all, part of the adventure. I had fought to get here. This was my destiny. I floated, rocked gently to sleep again, content that I was free. I was free. I was on the Titanic and going to a new world. I was free. Everything was going to be OK.