

Titanic : The Countess of Rothes and the Phantom Light

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LADY ROTHES DESCRIBES THE HORROR OF SURVIVORS' CHASE OF PHANTOM LIGHT

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"The pitiful sadness of our rowing, rowing toward the lights of a ship that disappeared. We in boat No. 8 saw some tramp steamer's mast head lights, and then we saw the glow of red as she swung toward us for a few minutes. Then darkness and despair." Lady Rothes yesterday, at the Ritz Carlton, told of her experience on board the Titanic. "I went to bed at half-past seven," she said, "and my cousin, Miss Gladys Cherry, who shared my room---No. 77 on deck B---also retired. It was bitterly cold. I was awakened by a slight jar and then a grating noise. I turned on the light and saw that it was 11:46, and I wondered at the sudden quiet. Gladys had not been awakened and I called her and asked did she not think it strange that the engines had stopped. As I opened our cabin door I saw a steward. He said we had struck some ice. Our fur coats over our night gowns were all the clothes we had. My cousin asked the chief steward if there was any danger and he answered, 'Oh no, we have just grazed some ice and it does not amount to anything.'

The Call for Lifebelts

"As we hurried along Lambert Williams came up and explained that the water-tight compartments must surely hold. Just then an officer hurried by. "'Will you all get your lifebelts on! Dress warmly and come up to A deck!' Quite stunned by the order, we all went. As I was going in to our stateroom my maid said water was pouring into the racquet court. I gave her some brandy, tied on her lifebelt and told her to go straight up on deck. We had to ask a steward where our lifebelts could be found. The man said he was sure they were unnecessary until we told him we had been ordered to do so. "We dressed as warmly as we could and went up to A deck. Mr. Brown, the purser, touched his hat as we passed, saying:---'It is quite all right; don't hurry!' What a lovely night it was! I stood close to Mrs. Astor. She was waiting under the starboard ports of the library and her husband got a chair for her. She was quite calm. The last I saw of Colonel Astor was when he still stood by his wife, trying to comfort her.

"Captain Smith stood shoulder to shoulder with me as I got into the life boat, and the last words were to the able seaman--Tom Jones--'Row straight for those ship lights over there; leave your passengers on board of her and return as soon as you can.' Captain Smith's whole attitude was one of great calmness and courage, and I am sure he thought that the ship--whose lights we could plainly see--would pick us up and that our life boats would be able to do double duty in ferrying passengers to the help that gleamed so near. "There were two stewards in boat No. 8 with us and thirty-one women. The name of the steward was Crawford. We were lowered quietly to the water, and when we had pushed off from the Titanic's side I asked the seaman if he would care to have me take the tiller, as I knew something about boats. He said, 'Certainly, lady.' I climbed aft into the stern sheets and asked my cousin to help me. "The first impression I had as we left the ship was that above all things we must not lose our self-control. We had no officer to take command of our boat, and the little seaman had to assume all the responsibility. He did it nobly, alternately cheering us with words of encouragement, then rowing doggedly. Then Signora de Satode Penasco began to scream for her husband. It was too horrible. I left the tiller to my cousin and slipped down beside her to be of what comfort I could. Poor woman! Her sobs tore our hearts and her moans were unspeakable in their sadness. Miss Cherry stayed at the tiller of our boat until the Carpathia picked us up. "The most awful part of the whole thing was seeing the rows of portholes vanishing one by one. Several of us--and Tom Jones--wanted to row back and see if there was not some chance for rescuing any one that had possibly survived, but the majority in the boat ruled, that we had no right to risk their lives on the bare chance of finding any one alive after the final plunge. They also said that the captain's own orders had been to 'row for those ship lights over there,' and that we who wished to try for others who might be drowning had no business to interfere with his orders. Of course that settled the matter, and we rowed on. "Indeed, I saw--we all saw--a ship's lights not more than three miles away!" Turning to Lord Rothes, Lady Rothes said:--"I am a fair judge of distances, am I not?" He answered, "Yes, you are."

The Lights Disappear

Continuing, Lady Rothes said:-- "For three hours we pulled steadily for the two masthead lights that showed brilliantly in the darkness. For a few minutes we saw the ship's port light, then it vanished, and the masthead lights got dimmer on the horizon until they, too, disappeared. "A Mrs. Smith did yeoman service. She rowed for five hours with Tom Jones without taking a rest. Really, she was magnificent, not only in her attitude, but in the whole souled way in which she worked. "Mrs. Pearson also rowed, and my maid, Roberta Maioni, rowed the last half of the night. "I did not know Mr. Ismay by sight, until one night at dinner in the restaurant he came in late, and some one pointed him out to me as being the managing director of the line. There was no excitement of any kind, save that once the third class passengers became obstreperous, but it was instantly put down. "When the awful end came, I tried my best to keep the Spanish woman from hearing the agonizing sound of distress. They seemed to continue forever, although it could not have been more than ten minutes until the silence of a lonely sea dropped down. The indescribable loneliness, the ghastliness of our feelings never can be told. We tried to keep in touch with the other boats by shouting and succeeded fairly well. Our boat was the furthest away because we had chased the phantom lights for three hours. Yes, I rowed for three hours."

Roberta Maioni, the maid, said:--

"I was not at all frightened. Everybody was saying as we left the ship that 'she was good for twelve hours yet' and I was too numb to realize the terror of it all until we were safe on board the Carpathia ." "Brave men, all that stood back so that the women should have at least a chance to live!" said Lady Rothes. "Their memories should be held sacred in the mind of the world forever."

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