

ocean liners. Their goal was to give the White Star Line a competitive edge in the Atlantic passenger trade with several gigantic ships whose **accommodations** would be the last word in comfort and elegance.

20 The two men certainly dreamed on a grand scale.<sup>2</sup> When these floating palaces were finally built, they were so much bigger than other ships that new docks had to be built on each side of the Atlantic to service them. Four years after that London dinner party, the first of these huge liners, the *Olympic*, safely completed her maiden voyage.<sup>3</sup>

On May 31, 1911, the hull of the *Titanic* was launched at the Harland & Wolff shipyards in Belfast, Ireland, before a cheering crowd of 100,000. Bands played, and people came from miles around to see this great wonder of the sea. Twenty-two tons of soap, grease, and train oil were used to slide her into the water. In the words of one eyewitness,  
30 she had “a rudder as big as an elm tree . . . propellers as big as a windmill. Everything was on a nightmare scale.” **B**

For the next ten months the *Titanic* was outfitted and carefully prepared down to the last detail. The final size and richness of this new ship was astounding. She was 882 feet long, almost the length of four city blocks. With nine decks, she was as high as an eleven-story building.

Among her gigantic features, she had four huge funnels, each one big enough to drive two trains through. During construction an astonishing three million rivets had been hammered into her hull. Her three enormous anchors weighed a total of thirty-one tons—the weight of  
40 twenty cars. And for her maiden voyage, she carried enough food to feed a small town for several months.

As her name boasted, the *Titanic* was indeed the biggest ship in the world. Nicknamed “the Millionaires’ Special,” she was also called “the Wonder Ship,” “the Unsinkable Ship,” and “the Last Word in Luxury” by newspapers around the world. **C**

The command of this great ocean liner was given to the senior captain of the White Star Line, Captain Edward J. Smith. This proud, white-bearded man was a natural leader and was popular with both crew members and passengers. Most important, after thirty-eight years’ service  
50 with the White Star Line, he had an excellent safety record. At the age of fifty-nine, Captain Smith was going to retire after this last trip, a perfect final tribute to a long and successful career.

On Wednesday, April 10, 1912, the *Titanic*’s passengers began to arrive in Southampton for the trip to New York. Ruth Becker was dazzled as she boarded the ship with her mother, her younger sister, and two-year-old brother, Richard. Ruth’s father was a missionary in India. The rest of the

**accommodations**

(ə-kōm’ə-dā’shənz)  
n. rooms and food, especially in a hotel or on a ship or train

**B NARRATIVE NONFICTION**

What details help you picture the **setting** of the *Titanic*’s launch?

**C NARRATIVE NONFICTION**

What do the newspaper quotations add to your understanding?

2. **on a grand scale:** in a large or impressive way.

3. **maiden voyage:** very first trip.